Motor Racing British Grand Prix

Villeneuve is back in the hunt

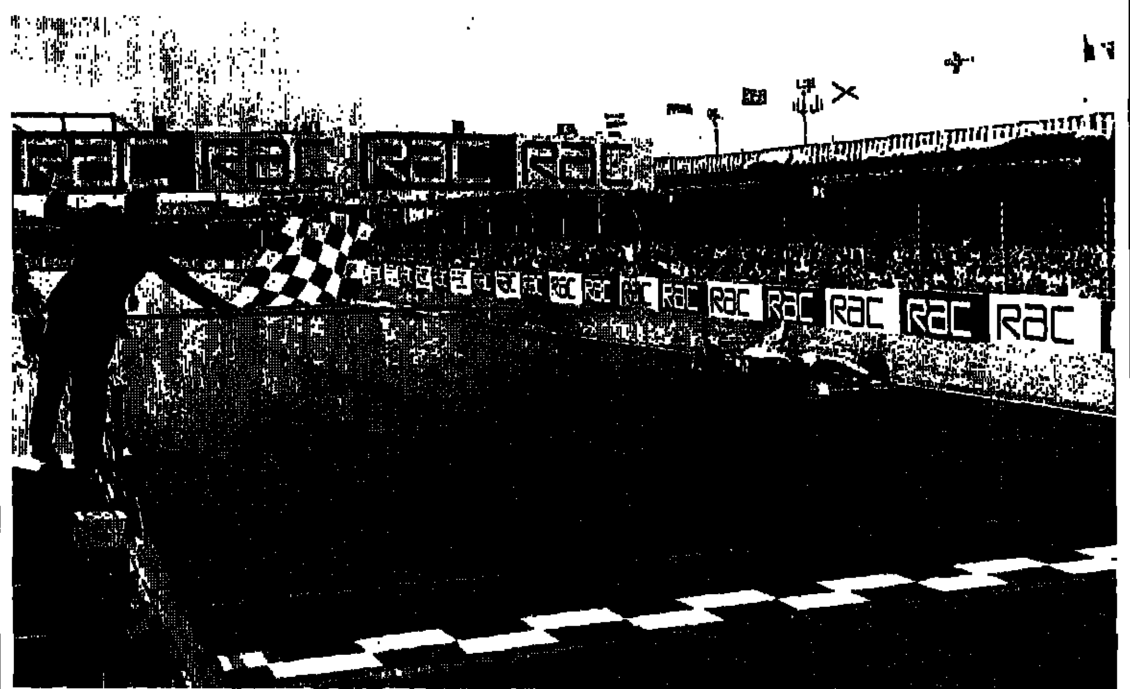
Richard Williams

JACQUES Villeneuve and his Williams-Renault won the British Grand Prix at Silverstone last Sunday, a predictable result from an entirely unpredictable race. Three drivers led the race for substantial periods and any of them might have won it, and three or four others were in close contention.

Villeneuve's victory, his fourth of the year, came despite an early problem with a loose front wheel that required him to fight his way back from seventh place. It carried him to within four points of the championship leader Michael Schumacher and enabled the Williams team — celebrating their 100th win — to close to within three points of Ferrari in the constructors' championship.

Second and third, travelling in close company 10 seconds behind Villeneuve, were the Benetton-Renaults of Jean Alesi and Alexander Wurz. At 33, Alesi seems to have swapped consistency for his old wildness and now stands third in the championship. And for Wurz, the 23-year-old Austrian substituting for his ailing compatriot Gerhard Berger, the third finish of his three-race career provided a first chance to taste podium champagne.

David Coulthard brought his McLaren-Mercedes home in fourth place after problems with his brakes, with Ralf Schumacher's Jordan-Peugeot fifth. In sixth place — glory be — came Damon Hill's Arrows-Yamaha, earning the world champion his first point of the season and a large measure of personal satisfaction after a week marred by political turbulence within his team.



Checking in . . . Jacques Villeneuve takes the flag at Silverstone PHOTOGRAPH: TOM JENKINS

Villeneuve deserved his win, but two other men might have taken it from him with equal merit. Michael Schumacher led the middle section of the race convincingly before retiring with a broken wheel bearing on his Ferrari, and Mika Hakkinen seemed to have worked his McLaren into an ideal position late in the race before his Mercedes engine blew with six of the 59 laps left.

The only serious contender never in with a chance of winning the race turned out to be Heinz-Harald Frentzen, who lined up next to Villeneuve, his team-mate, on the front row but caused an aborted start when he stalled his engine. The German driver was relegated to the back of the grid for the restart; he tore past half a dozen backmarkers as they made their way through Copse Corner but was struck in the rear by Jos Verstappen's Tyrrell as they went through Becketts and he ended his race on the grass.

When Villeneuve made his first pit-stop on lap 21, an old Williams problem reared its head. His left front wheel had come loose, causing damage that cost an extra 20 seconds as the mechanics struggled to remove and replace it.

His race mechanic, Jock Clear, said the wheel and hub would have to be inspected before it could be determined whether it was a problem similar to the one that cost Hill victory at Silverstone in 1996 and sent one of Villeneuve's wheels into the debris fencing at Suzuka later that season.

Schumacher, who had already made his first stop, assumed a commanding lead over Coulthard and the rest as Villeneuve began his fight-back. Unlike the Williams and Ferraris, both McLarens had planned to make only one stop, and halfway around lap 28 Coulthard decided that his braking problems had become serious enough for him to wave Hakkinen past, shortly before the Finn dived into his pit.

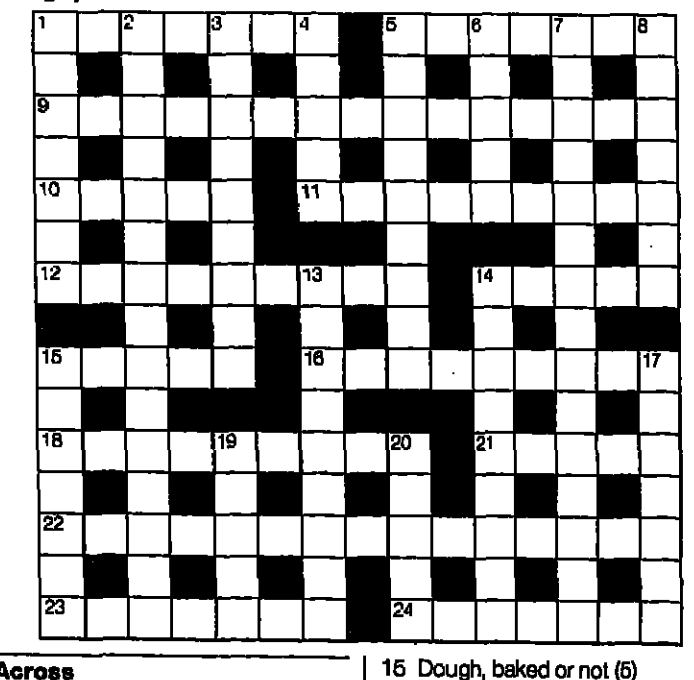
At the end of lap 37 Schumacher came in for his second stop, but he had completed less than a lap after his resumption when the car twitched, smoke came from the left rear wheel and he limped to the garage to retire.

Now Villeneuve regained the lead for seven laps, ahead of Irvine and Hakkinen. At the end of lap 44 the Williams and the Ferrari made their second stops — but whereas Villeneuve zoomed back out into second place, five seconds behind Hakkinen, Irvine travelled only a few yards beyond the pit wall before coming to a halt with a broken drive shaft.

Hakkinen's lead came down to less than a second over the next few laps but there was no guarantee that Villeneuve would find his way past a driver noted for a willingness to close the door on would-be overtakers. "I could see his rear tyres blistering," Villeneuve said, "and he was starting to slide around. I think I could have made a move before the end of the race."

On the 54th lap a sudden cloud of smoke from the Mercedes engine saved him the trouble. For the Finn this was a particular disappointment. A veteran of 88 starts, and commonly accepted as one of the quickest of all current drivers and the most cerebral, he had seemed on the verge of his first grand prix win.

Cryptic crossword by Araucaria



Across

1 Range of flight from the West with nonsense about to return (7)
5 50% reduction in one over 8? (4,3)
9 Officer in charge's performance isn't out of the ordinary (7,8)
10 Son of the Welsh concealed by insect (5)
11 Man with machine turning elm to oak, right? (9)
12 Catch 22 hero that entertains Hitler's guards with song (9)
14 Races in light brown, which is mad (5)
15 Dough, baked or not (5)
16 American writer, second edition? (4,5)
18 American writer: note what's said without much evidence (4,5)
21 J.R., say, without success (5)
22 Cinema (inner half) should be destroyed (the Luddite view?) (8,7)
23 From Manchester I left having achieved nothing (7)
24 Plants one left on trees (7)

Down

1 A grey Great Britain, result of extreme penury (7)
2 A lot of terrific lifting devices on top, the French weapon (10,5)
3 Employee's greeting to one in flagrante delicto? (5,4)
4 I leave little room for occupation (2,3)
5 Hunter of big brute — Marx got one right (9)
6 See with stand-in bishop? (5)
7 Insect at quiet "island valley", whence one goes out to go in (7,8)
8 They hold displacement of rug to be an act of God (7)
13 Blow me! I am tied and it can't wait (9)
14 Flower to go with coffee dish? (9)
15 It's his turn to find hidden mike and traps (7)
17 Black girl's direction on departure (7)
19 What the Jury says hasn't caught the composer (5)
20 The snake girl — mine, said Boccaccio (5)

Last week's solution

Rugby Union Test Match: Australia 25 England 6

England Lions to the slaughter

Greg Growden in Sydney

ALTHOUGH England's excruciatingly long season ended as expected with a substantial, in some respects embarrassing, defeat to Australia, their coach surprisingly remained a happy Jack.

A few minutes after a jet-lagged England left the Sydney Football Stadium, their coach Jack Rowell attempted to show he was not a man under pressure by producing some bizarre statements about the match he had just witnessed.

The best was that the England season had ended on a high and they were now playing in a refreshing style. Perhaps Rowell was suffering battle fatigue as badly as most of his Test players, because if anyone seriously believes England were refreshing against the Wallabies, or hit a season high, it is time to open the medicine cabinet.

Admittedly this Test should not have been played, because it was inhumane to expect England to be competitive when the bulk of the squad had just finished the Lions tour of South Africa.

But England hardly helped themselves by showing that their attacking capabilities were well below what was required to threaten Australia, who were also well off their game but displayed enough composure when required to win easily.

England's defence in the first hour was excellent, Australia having more than 85 per cent possession but being restricted to one try — in the 10th minute after Joe Roff and Matthew Burke combined in an Australian Capital Territory blind-side wing move. Similarly, criticism cannot be levelled at the England back row, who until the final moments were tenacious.

But the attack lacked structure, focus and penetration. What was worse was that their captain Phil de Glanville struggled in the basics of tackling. For Burke's try the Australia attack easily cut between the England centres, and Ben Tune's try in the 60th minute came after the wing easily pushing aside de Glanville in midfield.

That England were only two points behind shortly after half-time was testament to their willpower. But fatigue eventually had to tell against the tourists, prompting three tries against them in the final quarter and quickly turning Australia's precarious 8-6 lead into an overwhelming 25-6 advantage.

● Wayne Proctor was the toast of Wales after he scored his first Test hat-trick to give the touring Rugby Union side a 2-0 series victory over the United States in San Francisco. The Llanelli wing struck twice in the first half to help Wales into a big lead. But he reserved his best for last as he mesmerised the opposition to record a 30-metre touchline run. The tourists' narrow 28-23 win owed much to brilliant defending.

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Under the weather . . . Residents in Eisenhuettenstadt, Germany, remove valuables from their workshop as floods continue to swamp low-lying areas on the German-Polish border PHOTO: FABRIZIO BENSCH

Raging floods ravage central Europe

FLOOD-HIT residents of central Europe, exhausted from two weeks of floods that have killed about 100 people and devastated crops and farms, took hope on Monday from weather forecasts suggesting that the worst rains this century may soon be over.

But downstream on the river Oder, dividing Germany and Poland, some communities still faced grim battles with encroaching water and possible evacuation. Thousands of rescue workers, fire fighters, border guards and soldiers were ready for action if the dykes break when another wave of water surges down the Oder on Wednesday, bringing debris from the floods in Poland.

Some areas in southwest and south Poland on Monday remained under the water that inundated more than 1,000 towns and villages. The death toll was at least 50 people and 140,000 have been forced to evacuate their homes.

On the German side of the Oder, workers have been fighting to repair dykes to prevent the river breaking its banks and flooding thousands of low-lying hectares.

New health dangers threatened southwestern Polish cities such as Wroclaw, where a lack of clean water prompted fears of an epidemic of dysentery. But most of the rivers in the east of the Czech Republic, where 46 people have died in recent weeks, were falling on Monday.

As the floodwaters recede, Czechs are faced with a massive clean-up operation. The floods have destroyed some 1,600 houses and damaged 10,000 in 500 towns and villages, the deputy prime minister, Josef Lux, said.

Meanwhile raging floods caused by weeks of torrential downpours have killed 164 people in China's southwestern province of Guizhou, the state radio said on Monday.

"Up to yesterday, seven million people have been affected by the disaster and 164 people have been killed," it reported.

Flooding is an ancient curse across much of southern China, where summer rains can burst river dykes and inundate towns, cities and huge swathes of farmland.

While floods wreak havoc in the south, drought and high temperatures have been plaguing northern China, with rainfall dropping by as much as 90 per cent from the same period last year. — *Reuter*

IRA ceasefire wins cautious welcome

David Sharrock and Ewen MacAskill

THE IRA, in a surprise development, declared a new ceasefire in Northern Ireland at the weekend, but it was greeted with caution in the province and outright suspicion by Ulster Unionists, who say the British government has caved in to Sinn Fein demands.

Tony Blair was making desperate attempts this week to keep everyone aboard his peace train and dissuade David Trimble's Ulster Unionists from leaving the peace talks in frustration at concessions made to produce the renewed IRA ceasefire.

The Ulster Unionists managed to keep the peace talks alive on Monday after hinting that a deal might still be reached before Wednesday's crucial vote on the contentious issue of paramilitary arms.

Both sides are struggling to find a formula so that the Ulster Unionist leader can avoid plunging the Stormont talks into crisis by voting against the British and Irish governments' proposals for decommissioning weapons.

Under proposals announced last week, only hours before the Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, announced that he was urging the IRA to call another ceasefire, there is no longer a binding commitment on any party linked to paramilitary organisations to achieve the dismantling of the terrorist arsenals.

In private, the Government was pleased with Monday's outcome, believing Unionist attacks over decommissioning arms help balance the criticism by the nationalist community after the Drumcree parade earlier this month.

Mr Blair was said to be hopeful, though advisers warn him that this could be the last chance for peace and that if it fails, the situation will become a lot worse.

In theory, if all the Unionist parties were to vote against the plan this week the talks could collapse since the rules demand "sufficient consensus". The hardline Democratic Unionists have already announced they will walk out.

The independent UK Unionist, Bob McCartney, led his party out of Stormont on Monday, minutes after Sinn Fein were ushered for the first time into Castle Buildings on the Stormont estate in east Belfast, the venue for the all-party talks.

At Westminster, Mr Trimble said that he wanted to keep London and Dublin to their word that they will seek a gradual handover of paramilitary weaponry during the talks. "What we want both governments to say is that they expect that decommissioning would occur during talks," he said.

Downing Street said Mr Blair still wants a disposal of weaponry under the supervision of an independent body, to be established by the end of this month and chaired by John de Chastelain, formerly chief of staff of the Canadian Defence Forces.

The SDLP leader John Hume said there was an urgent need to build on the IRA ceasefire. "These talks should begin to concentrate on what they are really about, getting down to the serious business of reaching agreement on how we live together."

Despite the ceasefire, security levels in Northern Ireland will not be relaxed because of the continuing threat from breakaway republican groups.

Door to peace, page 10
Adams ascendancy, page 12

Global study finds world speaking in 10,000 tongues

John Carvel

AFTER years of research, an international network of scholars, run from a village in west Wales, has established that the world's stock of languages is richer than ever imagined — and more resilient to the spread of English as the global *lingua franca*.

David Dalby, director of the Observatoire Linguistique based at Hebron in Dyfed, said his team — which this week announced the completion of the first comprehensive classification of world languages and dialects — had identified more than 10,000 living languages, some 50 per cent more than previous estimates.

The first copy of its 1,600-page global register was to be presented to Unesco this week as a gift to celebrate Britain's decision to rejoin the educational and cultural offshoot of the United Nations.

The register, including an elaborate system for codifying linguistic families, could be described as the world's first Babel bible. But Dr Dalby said he was opposed to the whole imagery of the Tower of Babel, which was based on a mistaken theory that multilingualism was bad.

"We need a diversity of language because multilingualism is a normal and healthy part of the way human society is organised. Language is a means of personal and group identity. It is interesting that major conflicts have developed in Rwanda and Somalia, which are among the few monolingual areas in Africa," he said.

"One or more languages — certainly English — may develop as a world language, but it should be developed alongside multilingualism. You can see from the success in the comparative league tables of children in bilingual schools in Wales how learning in two languages sharpens the wits.

"Monolingualism is a disadvantage like illiteracy, and this is a serious danger for anglophones. Bilingualism should be regarded as an educational norm."

The register will form the basis of a computerised map of the world's linguistic communities which Unesco plans to complete by 2001. Dr Dalby said the work has begun with a language map of Africa he has produced with colleagues at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (Soas).

Full details of the number of world languages are being withheld until publication of the register later this year, but Dr Dalby said it showed the linguistic complexity of the world was much greater than supposed. Reports that a third of spoken tongues would become extinct in the next few years were "absolute rubbish", he said.

There was a threat to small languages spoken by fragile hunter-gathering communities in the Arctic, Amazonia, south-west Africa and Australia. Without artificial help, they could follow the Pygmy languages of central Africa into extinction. But the great mass of languages were not being driven out by the growth of English.

The observatory and SOAS are also working on a map of the 275 languages used at home by London schoolchildren.

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 450	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30

Newspapers should have to prove their allegations

I READ with interest your editorial concerning the reform of the British libel laws in the wake of the Aitken trial (July 13). Aitken's perjury aside, and without having access to the relevant legislation, I do not feel you have made a convincing case for reversal of burden of proof. It seems logical that whoever makes an allegation of misconduct should have marshalled their evidence of wrong-doing before any publication goes to print.

Within the field with which I am more familiar, conclusions based on scientific data are disseminated through peer-reviewed journals. Acceptance of a paper is dependent on an author having presented all the necessary facts in support of a hypothesis or in refutation of a theory. Drawing conclusions without the facts at hand is poor science; a strong belief that something is so, despite a lack of supporting evidence, is the road to scientific fraud.

My dissatisfaction with your editorial stems primarily from your statement with reference to the Aitken case: "The one thing we were sure of was that he was lying. Proving it . . . was a different matter." Surely responsible journalism requires that the proof has been obtained before libel proceedings request it, otherwise on what have you based your certainty? A large newspaper exists to disseminate information. When the information makes allegations about the conduct of an individual, however public his or her position, it should present the facts that support the allegations.

If the onus of proof were on the spotlighted individual, then less scrupulous journalists would have little incentive to assemble hard evidence beforehand. Public figures could then find that a significant proportion of their time is spent digging up evidence to refute allegations made by the press.

Retractions made by the press, should libel be proven, carry less impact than the original allegations and for many of the public the charges would have stuck. When professional reputations are being questioned, the facts necessary to convince "a judge sitting alone", a jury, or the general public, should be presented concurrently.
Philip Seddon,
Taif, Saudi Arabia

"*WE TAKE* no pleasure in the ruin of a man . . ." you declare in your editorial on Jonathan Aitken (June 29). Really? In that case, allow me to take it for you.

I'm not alone in enjoying the spectacle of overweening politicians being brought down by tenacious journalists backed by an editor who does not turn to water at the first sign of a defamation writ.
Ron Knowles,
Kurrajong, NSW, Australia

Americans sing vacation blues

KAMAL AHMED'S article on work weeks and annual holidays in Britain and Europe (June 29) would have been all the more interesting had the US been included in the comparison. What percentage of the workforce in Britain or Europe, for example, takes less that three weeks' vacation a year? Less than two? In the United States, two weeks' vacation a year is the norm and often no vacation is permitted during the first year of a new job. A third week is awarded after five years, though the chances of surviving five years at one company are vanishingly small.

Vacation time is entirely a matter of company policy. I know a number of Americans who take no time off at all. "I'm going on vacation" frequently means a long weekend. And this on top of work weeks that are virtually always in excess of 50 hours.

In accordance with the American ideal of freedom (To Those Who Have More Shall Be Given), the holders of prestigious, higher-paying jobs enjoy considerably greater benefits.

Here in Silicon Valley, where harsh work regimes are pervasive, a bizarre development has occurred. It is regarded as "cool" to work brutally long hours. Companies advertise free carry-out dinners as a fringe "benefit" (I suspect that one's family is not included).

But because America is the cradle and guardian of freedom and family values you naturally have a choice: submit, flip hamburgers, or starve.

Workaholism, and the impoverished life it engenders, have been enshrined as a social virtue. The slavery of whips and chains has been replaced by a socially-acceptable, glamorised, self-policed variant in which you drive a flashy car, sleep in your own bed, and are generally too busy and exhausted to think about politics. Or freedom.
Cecil Bloch,
Mountain View, California, USA

Nato's dilemma in Bosnia

MARTIN WOOLLACOTT is right to suggest that Nato actions in Bosnia are intimately linked to the need to improve the international standing of the institution, which looked as if it would be consigned to the history books with the ending of the cold war (Nato puts its future on the line in Bosnia, July 20).

However, the rhetoric of armed intervention as the solution to the still fragmented nature of the Bosnian state is based on the dubious premise that a handful of indicted and unindicted alleged war criminals are the barrier to reconciliation.

It would appear that any Bosnian Serbs in a position of power are now fair game as scapegoats for the lack of success of the Dayton peace accords. This neglects the embarrassing fact that at elections the nationalist parties on all three sides continue to receive a popular mandate, and there is very little support for the élitist civic groups who argue for cross-entity co-operation. One of the reasons for this is the insecurity felt by ordinary people in many parts of the state. The return of sanctions, snatch squads and upping the stakes militarily will merely make the divisions worse.

If Martin Woollacott put the interests of Bosnian people before the need of Nato for a new mission and some good public relations, he would maybe question the black and white morality play of evil Bosnian leaders versus the white knights of the international community.

It is a shame that the lack of a coherent role for Nato in the post-cold war era seems to necessitate the demonisation of Bosnians and their elected representatives.
Dave Chandler,
International Social Policy Research Unit, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds

Quarantine shames Britain

EARLIER this year, I watched a programme by Germany's ZDF station on the British rabies quarantine disaster: I had never thought I could ever be so embarrassed for and by my fellow Britons, the so-called animal lovers, with their insistence on rabies quarantine even for animals that have been properly vaccinated against the disease and have had blood tests that prove the efficacy of the vaccination.

Professor Dr Jürgen Unshelm of Munich University made the point that the act of separating a pet from its human family and enclosing it in a wire and concrete cage for one entire half year of its life in itself contravenes all animal protection laws. We saw scenes of the conditions in which some of these sad and horribly distressed detainees were kept at a cost to their owners of anything up to £2,000: wire cages with concrete floors covered in excrement and absolutely no outlet for exercise — they may not defile British soil by so much as one paw print.

Now that Switzerland has also eradicated the disease, I believe all of Western Europe is free from rabies. This was achieved in every case by vaccination, not quarantine.

The new government wants to eliminate all kinds of public malpractice — this would be a good place to start.
B Locher,
Huettikon, Switzerland

Canada on a 'slippery slope'

I WOULD like to provide some balance to the flurry of cheerleading letters you have received from my fellow countrymen.

Canada may have been great in the past, but it is no longer. We are fragmented and going downhill fast. This is thanks in part to the adoption — almost without reserve — of the globalisation agenda. We have growing poverty, more homeless people — especially here in Toronto — and a very poor record on the environment.

Tony Blair should have reserved his criticism on the environment for Canada rather than the United States. We are the country that has completely abandoned the Rio agreements. Our former minister of the energy scrapped (completelyl) Canada's commitment to ozone reductions when the large corporations that fund her party objected. Our prime minister, when asked about the environment, offered the following: "I drove one of those new propane buses. They are great!"

Despite high unemployment and American-style social problems, many Canadians live in a permanent state of denial. Our anti-social, business-oriented, Americanised culture is ruining our country, and while the UN ranking system may provide us with a false sense of security the fact remains that we are winning the race to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.
John Richmond,
Toronto, Canada

Briefly

AT LAST it's official: "The state is essential for putting in place the appropriate institutional foundations for markets," says the World Bank, reversing its attitude of the 1980s (World Bank in surprise policy U-turn, July 6).

Had Margaret Thatcher read her Adam Smith more attentively she would have known that, far from there being no such thing as society, he took it as self-evident that capitalism flourished within a functional society.
S Bourke,
Fukuyama, Japan

I MUST respond to Brian A Jones's amusing reprimand (July 13) of Paul Evans for using "I" instead of "me".

For a living language, the rules of grammar must constantly change to reflect the forms of everyday speech. In the sixties, educationists realised the error of imposing middle-class values on children and allowed them to use the language the way they felt most comfortable.

To adjust his ear to contemporary British English, Mr Jones might like to learn the following lines and recite them every evening before going to sleep:

Mum made a pie for my brother and I;
Him and me had it for tea.

Mike Kearney,
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales

GIANNI VERSACE designed clothes for that rare breed who is attractive enough to wear them, rich enough to afford them, and brainless enough to attach such importance to them. A loss? Apparently so to this pampered and vain elite, but I suspect that the rest of us will probably get over it.
Mike Pokorny,
St Albans, Hertfordshire

TIM RADFORD reports in "Genes say boys will be boys and girls will be sensitive" (June 29) that British scientists have discovered that nature, not nurture, is the cause of boys being oafish and girls being sensitive. No doubt the next thing Science discovers is that little boys are made of snips and snails and puppy dog tails, and little girls are made of sugar and spice and all things nice.
Michael MacRoberts,
Shreveport, Louisiana, USA

FURTHER to the remarkable US research findings that smoking during pregnancy could produce criminal sons (July 20), should we not push back further the boundaries of scientific knowledge by testing for a correlation between cigar-smoking men and tax fraud?
Gordon Crawford,
Leeds

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Warlord wins free Liberia election

James Rupert in Monrovia

CHARLES TAYLOR, the warlord who started and dominated Liberia's brutal seven-year civil war, appeared on Monday to have won by election the power he was unable to seize in battle.

With a third of the ballots counted from last weekend's presidential poll, Mr Taylor had a 66 per cent lead in what Liberians say was their country's most free election. His main rival, former World Bank and United Nations official Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, polled less than 16 per cent of the vote.

It also appeared that Mr Taylor's party would get a majority in a new legislature, which is being elected by a proportional representation of the nationwide vote.

The credible election fulfils a goal of the United States and of European and west African nations, which are trying to help rebuild the collapsed Liberian state. But Mr Taylor's victory frustrates the long-held desire by many of those countries to keep him out of power because they see him as a corrupt and pompous authoritarian.

The election represents an important step forward for a country riven by factional ethnic strife. But Mr Taylor's apparent victory will raise immediate new concerns. If he has proven himself Liberia's most popular political figure, in some circles he remains its most hated.

During a war that killed an estimated 150,000 people and included brutality on all sides, human rights groups frequently reported atrocities by Mr Taylor's forces. In addition, Mr Taylor has bitter enemies among Liberia's Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups.

Observers from the UN, the European Union and other groups had high marks for the way last Saturday's balloting was conducted. Still, the control that Mr Taylor's faction exercised in much of the country gave him huge advantages during the campaign.

For years, his forces have run a quasi-government in much of the country, financing it by selling off the riches of Liberia's mines and forests. But a Taylor victory will have been won with more than his war booty. Mr Taylor's persona as a powerful leader appealed to many who believe the country needs a firm hand following seven years of fratricide.

Charles Taylor supporters cling to a lorry in Monrovia during the largely peaceful Liberian presidential election campaign

Human cost rules out Israeli invasion of Palestinian cities

Julian Borger in Jerusalem

THE Israeli Defence Force has warned the government that retaking Palestinian-run cities is not a realistic option after army war-games showed that it would cost hundreds of soldiers' lives.

The IDF carried out exercises last month to rehearse Operation Thorn Field, a contingency plan under which Israeli troops would re-enter some or all of the seven cities handed over to the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo peace accords.

According to Yediot Aharnot newspaper, IDF generals concluded: "Israel has nothing to gain from a violent confrontation with the Palestinians. They can only lose. Neither will the Palestinians gain anything."

The possibility of such an operation has been raised increasingly by government officials as peace talks have stalled in recent months and unrest in Palestinian areas has risen.

After several weeks of riots in Hebron, the government is reported to have threatened the reoccupation of the Arab sector of the town if the Palestinian Authority did not take firmer measures to end the unrest. In response, several hundred extra Palestinian police were deployed in the town centre.

However, the chief of the Palestinian police in Hebron, Colonel Tariq Zaid, said at the time he did not believe the Israeli threats. "The Israeli army will not come back again. They know the Palestinians would fight with their lives and many would die," he said.

According to Yediot and Israeli television news, the IDF generals agreed with Col Zaid. The predicted IDF death toll, based on the June exercises, is reported to have been several hundred, with many more wounded. The IDF has instead recommended more flexible and gradual responses to violence in the Palestinian cities, including reinforcements at flashpoints such as central Hebron.

The generals' recommendations are believed to have been requested by the prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, who called on his inner security cabinet to develop possible scenarios if relations between Israelis and Palestinians continued to worsen.

Israeli officials are confident that the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, can be wooed back to the negotiating table despite the continued work on new Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas.

The Israeli foreign minister, David Levy, this week met Nabil Shaath, a senior negotiator, for talks the Israelis hope will pave the way for a meeting between Mr Levy and Mr Arafat.

Another Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said that the United States was preparing a parallel initiative aimed at breaking the current impasse in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Mr Erekat described the plan as "a package deal" but refused to go into further detail. Palestinian sources said they believed the US proposal would involve a six-month moratorium on Jewish settlements.

Mr Netanyahu has so far offered to slow down settlement construction but ruled out stopping the building work.

The prime minister's new political adviser, Uzi Arad, has meanwhile been promoting an Israeli proposal involving immediate talks on a final territorial settlement with the Palestinians.

Hard hands grab levers of power in Cambodia

Nick Cumming-Bruce in Bangkok

THE fate of Cambodia's short and shaky experiment with democracy hangs in the balance this week as the exiled victims of the coup earlier this month try to win the backing of foreign governments and Hun Sen consolidates his grip.

Hun Sen has bluntly rebuffed offers of mediation by the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean). That may in part be bluff, echoing his statement after the coup that if Asean wanted to meddle in Cambodian affairs he would not want to be in Asean. In fact he is still urging Asean leaders to admit him to their influential club, as originally planned, at the end of this month.

More probably it reflects his conviction, behind the heavily defended walls of the military base he calls home, that he has an unshakeable grip on the levers of power which the international community will soon accept.

His ousted former co-prime minister Prince Ranariddh may talk of 20,000 royalist troops ready to resist, but it is far from clear who will take up the challenge.

Hun Sen's forces have shattered organised royalist resistance in northwestern provinces. They marched into the last significant royalist-held town late last week, sending the demoralised and poorly equipped troops scurrying for sanctuary on the Thai border. The remaining members of the prince's party, Funcinpec, have run equally fast to accommodate Hun Sen's designs.

Funcinpec's choice of Prince Ranariddh's foreign minister, Ung Huot, as the new first prime minister is a case in point. A glib former Australian advertising executive, Ung Huot is well known to Asean governments and, in the words of one Western analyst: "The perfect choice, wholly unimpressive, certainly a puppet."

That would suit Hun Sen's strategy of preserving the facade of the multi-party constitution that emerged from the UN-backed peace accords, peacekeeping and 1993 elections. The substance promises to be rather different.

Hun Sen, educated in Cambodia's brutal conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s, cut his political teeth as a soldier with the Khmer Rouge and later under the tutelage of Vietnam's communist rulers.

"He is unable to understand the concepts of democracy," the commentator Raoul Jennar said. "He would say you rule and they must obey."

It takes a brave man to resist. The coup, which killed more than 40 people, injured more than 200, and inflicted tens of millions of dollars of damage on the economy, was only the most drastic of his violent reactions to opposition.

Few analysts doubt that he was responsible for the attempted assassination of the opposition leader Sam Rainsy by a grenade attack on a demonstration at the end of March, which killed at least 16 people and injured more than 100.

Human rights monitors believe that since the coup his subordinates have executed more than 35 people and detained hundreds.

Cambodians are predictably guarded about venturing an opinion of their leaders, but many express bleak disapproval of Hun Sen for a coup that shattered the political framework in which, however rocky, they had glimpsed hopes of stability and prosperity.

The Week

THE Clinton administration is backing an increase from five to 10 in the number of permanent members of the UN Security Council, including three seats for developing nations. Earlier, the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, unveiled plans for UN reform.
Washington Post, page 13

AFTER a near-disaster that sent space station Mir spinning in space, Russia has delayed repairs until a fresh crew arrives on August 7.

THREE jailed ETA guerrillas condemned the murder by fellow rebels of Miguel Angel Blanco, the young Spanish politician, signalling growing divisions within the Basque separatist movement.

MARALINGA, the contaminated site in the Australian outback where Britain tested atomic weapons more than 40 years ago, is to be turned into a tourist resort.

POLICE in the US are pleading for public help in the hunt for Andrew Cunanan, the prime suspect in the fatal shooting of fashion designer Gianni Versace in Miami Beach.
Washington Post, page 15

THE main Bosnian Serb party has expelled President Biljana Plavsic from their ranks and demanded her resignation. Mrs Plavsic has accused hard-line opponents of corruption.

BRAZIL'S top Indian affairs official, Julio Gaiger, has resigned, accusing the government of failing to honour its promises to help indigenous people.

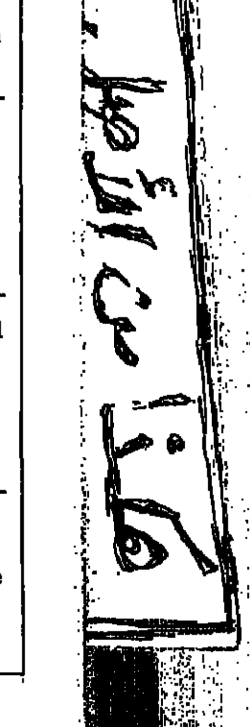
RUSSIAN president Boris Yeltsin has defied his generals and ordered that the armed forces be cut by 1.2 million men by 2000.

THE New Korea party has nominated Lee Hoi Chang, a former prime minister and supreme court judge, as its candidate to succeed President Kim Young Sam in February.

GEOLOGIST and astronomer Eugene Shoemaker has died after a car accident. Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9, which crashed into Jupiter in 1994, was named after him.

ALGERIAN troops have killed more than 90 hardline Armed Islamic Group guerrillas meeting in Blida province to discuss escalating their campaign against the government.

AN ARMED robber on the run in Johannesburg jumped into a gorilla's pen at the zoo. When the animal tried to defend his territory, he shot it twice. The gorilla recovered.



Row brews as six get nod to join EU

John Palmer in Strasbourg

THE European Commission has been told it may have to increase the number of countries with which it negotiates European Union membership beyond the recommended list it released in its Agenda 2000 report last week.

Members of the European Parliament are worried that a split in eastern Europe between applicants selected for membership and those asked to wait could inflame latent disputes over frontiers and ethnic minority communities.

In its report on enlargement, the Commission insists that only Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia and Cyprus are ready for the economic, political and legal commitments which go with EU membership.

Slovakia is told bluntly that its violations of democracy and human rights rule it out for now. To its evident anger, Turkey is also ruled out for early membership because of human rights abuses.

Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania pass the test of democracy and human rights, but are advised that they must make more economic and legal reforms.

To compensate those rejected for immediate membership negotiations, the EU is proposing a "European conference" to build co-operation on foreign policy, immigration, justice and the fight against international crime.

While generally welcoming the report, Members of the European Parliament warned of the dangers of creating a new division in eastern Europe which would cut through ethnic communities. Speakers referred to the risks of a split between Hungary on the one hand, and Romania and Slovakia — which have Hungarian-speaking minorities — on the other.

The Commission president, Jacques Santer, insisted no country would be excluded once it could show it had met economic and political conditions. "There will be no such thing as 'in' countries and 'out' countries: rather there will be the 'ins' and the 'pre-ins'," he said.

The commissioner for enlargement, Hans van den Broek, said that the progress made by countries such as Romania would be reviewed annually to see if it "might justify bringing new countries into accession negotiations".

Romania may be able to join membership negotiations a year or so after they begin in January with the group of six.

Russia too has expressed its ambition to become a full member of the European Union as part of its strategy for global economic integration and closer co-operation with the West.

Speaking after meeting Mr Santer in Brussels last Saturday, the Russian prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, gave a cautious backing to the EU's decision to begin negotiations with new member states in central and eastern Europe — in marked contrast to Moscow's unhappiness about Nato enlargement.

"We are preparing for full membership of the European Union and all our efforts are designed to achieve this in due time," Mr Chernomyrdin said. "I think that Russia should be in the European Union with all the implications and consequences, not all of which will be easy for us."

Mr Chernomyrdin said this goal took clear precedence over any concern that Russia might be put at a disadvantage by future EU enlargement to the east. Asked whether he was equally content to see one or more of the Baltic states join, he replied: "It is the European Union's own business whom they invite to join."

In private, senior EU officials expressed scepticism that Russia would ever be considered for full EU membership.

"Russia is a hugely important partner and our new agreement holds out the prospect of an eventual full customs union between Russia and the Union," a diplomat said. "In the meantime, we have to work together to achieve other desirable joint goals, such as Russia's membership of the World Trade Organisation."

Comment, page 12

German fury at burden of contributions

Ian Traynor in Bonn

CASH-STRAPPED and increasingly fed up with funding Brussels, Germany this week moved to reclaim some of its contributions to the European Union budget and demanded reform of funding.

The foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel, said Bonn was no longer willing to bear the burden of making more than half the net contributions to the EU treasury, and the Bavarian prime minister, Edmund Stoiber, called for negotiations by next year on a new funding system. "The aim is fairer burden-sharing among EU members," Mr Kinkel said.

The Brussels scheme has angered Bonn by leaving the EU funding system untouched. However, the budget is not the only element to upset Germany. Jochen Borchert, the German agriculture minister, has sharply criticised the Commission's proposals on reform of farm subsidies, saying they are unacceptable to Bonn.

In terms of net contributions to Brussels' coffers — what a country pays in, minus what it receives back from the EU budget — Germany is far and away the main EU paymaster. Confidential audits drawn up by the finance ministers of Germany's 16 federal states last month estimate that from 1991-94, Germany accounted for two-thirds of net contributions to the EU. In gross terms, Germany pays in about 30 per cent of the EU budget, but the net level rises to almost 70 per cent when benefits from Brussels are considered.

The finance ministers' estimate showed that in 1995 Germany paid almost $15 billion net to the EU, more than double that of France and Britain combined.

"Germany is the biggest net contributor although we're only medium-ranking in the EU prosperity league," Mr Stoiber said. He complained that Luxembourg and Denmark, for example, were richer than Germany per head of population, but were drawing out more than they pay in.

Mr Kinkel said the way contributions were calculated had to be changed since it penalised Germany, the EU's most populous member. Germany produced 25 per cent of the EU's GDP but paid in more than half the net contributions.

The finance ministers calculated that Germany is paying more than $6.5 billion a year too much to Brussels.

The huge costs incurred by German unification, record unemployment, falling tax receipts and a public finances crisis are all helping to mobilise German discontent with EU funding. Over the next year, state elections are due, culminating in national elections. The EU budget issue is an easy target for politicians.

Mr Stoiber said the system of calculating contributions should no longer be based on a member state's gross domestic product, but on GDP per capita and purchasing power.

● Austria and Italy agreed to join other EU countries in lifting border controls after a meeting on the Schengen pact with Germany in Innsbruck. They will open their borders from April 1 next year.

Agricultural reform to support farmers, not market prices

Stephen Bates in Brussels

IN A modest overhaul of the common agricultural policy — which absorbs nearly half the European Union's budget, or about $45 billion a year — the European Commission last week proposed a restructuring to channel money to farmers rather than maintain artificially high prices for their produce.

The Commission also wants to allocate funds to promote the environment and more ecologically friendly farming methods. Funds would be available for hard-pressed rural communities and alternative employment.

The changes, to be introduced gradually, would be cushioned by the growing underspend of the agricultural budget — more than $1 billion this year and double that next year, caused by buoyant prices and surpluses.

However, farmers will lose income once exposed to the open market — perhaps a 10 per cent decrease in support prices over the next decade. Franz Fischler, the agriculture commissioner, said: "Our objective is to compensate differences in income not differences in price."

This is bad news for the subsidised peasant farmers of southern Europe with their small farms and inefficient methods, but could be good news for most British farmers who as a whole have larger, more productive farms.

The loss of subsidies such as compulsory set-aside may spur them to compete by selling their produce on world markets. The National Farmers' Union estimated that British cereal farmers could lose $550 million in subsidies, dairy farmers $33 million and beef producers $150 million but that these could be offset by the freedom to sell on the world market.

Brussels argues that cereal farmers have been over-compensated in recent years because the subsidy mechanism has not taken account of high prices.

The alternative to reform, the Commission points out, is to spend more money on storing surplus food mountains and paying for more land to be kept fallow. Farmers in Spain, France, Italy, Greece and even Germany may not object to that if they maintain their prosperity. And it will be their governments, in the council of ministers, who will ultimately decide on reform.

Le Monde, page 17

Europe's poor relations

GDP per capita (at Purchasing Power Standards), 1995.
'000 ecus

Ecu: $1.1 — Source: Eurostat

Big business to foot Jospin's euro bill

Alex Duval Smith in Paris

THE French Socialist government's first budget was greeted with scepticism by business leaders this week.

Aimed at bringing the deficit as close as possible to the Maastricht criteria of 3 per cent of gross domestic product, it requires big business to pay the lion's share of the bill by temporarily increasing corporation tax to one of the highest rates in Europe.

At 40 per cent, the tax on business is 9 per cent higher than in Britain and 5 per cent higher than in the United States.

Judging it politically expedient not to call on individuals to make sacrifices for the single currency target, the prime minister, Lionel Jospin, ruled out income tax increases or cuts to the welfare system. In 1995, his rightwing predecessor, Alain Juppé, took the opposite course and it led to a month-long general strike.

But Mr Jospin's proposal temporarily to increase corporation tax for companies with a turnover of more than 50 million francs ($8.3 million) was criticised by the employers' organisation, the CNPF, which said: "You cannot treat companies as if they are an endless treasure trove of money from which you can help yourself to make up for excessive public spending."

The budget was timed to coincide with an official audit of state finances which put public deficit in 1997 at between 3.5 and 3.7 per cent of GDP.

The finance and industry minister, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, said government departments would save 10 billion francs this year, including 2 billion francs from defence.

He estimated that the increase in corporation tax from 36.6 per cent to 40 per cent in 1997 and 1998, and an increase in corporate capital gains tax from 19 to 41.6 per cent, would raise 22 billion francs. The total savings of 32 billion francs amounted to 0.4 per cent of GDP — enough to satisfy Maastricht criteria.

Ian Traynor in Bonn adds: The German finance minister, Theo Waigel, said he did not regard the French tax rises as cooking the books for the sake of the euro. He conceded that the euro was inconceivable without German and French participation but said he had been reassured by Paris that France would make the grade.

Right to silence . . . Symbolically gagged protesters demonstrate in Hong Kong PHOTOGRAPH: BOBBY YIP

Business moves against workers

Andrew Higgins in Hong Kong

TAM YIU-CHUNG, a former department store window dresser who now sits in the inner circle of Hong Kong's new élite, went to the London School of Economics to study trade unions just as Margaret Thatcher set about extending her victory over the miners into a general rout of British labour.

Today, he is part of a spectacle that not even Mrs Thatcher could have engineered. A leader of Hong Kong's biggest trade union, he is working hard to bury collective bargaining and overturn other modest trade union rights granted in the last days of colonial rule.

"It is easy to be a hero or a martyr but it is not always easy to explain why certain things are necessary," said Mr Tam, a veteran labour activist and appointed legislator who last week voted to suspend a raft of legislation expanding trade union powers. "Of course, I feel a bit uncomfortable."

The end of British rule has made a lot of people uncomfortable, not because they liked the British but because they disliked them. The departure of Governor Chris Patten has removed what was for many, particularly in the pro-China camp, the convenient smokescreen of Sino-British struggle.

Mr Tam is vice-chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), a Beijing-backed organisation that staged violent strikes and screamed Maoist slogans before being ordered to embrace "stability and prosperity".

Rival trade unionists say the FTU's loyalty to Beijing has meant selling out the workers to serve the tycoons in whose hands the Chinese Communist Party has placed the management of Hong Kong. Mr Tam sits in the executive council of Tung Chee-hwa, who took over from Mr Patten. He also has a seat in a handpicked legislature stacked with businessmen.

"There is an unholy alliance between tycoons and trade unionists," said Lee Cheuk-yan, author of the labour rights approved by the old legislature in June and suspended by its replacement last week.

"Behind this alliance is Beijing. China decides the general policy in Hong Kong. And the most important part of this policy for the Chinese government is not Hong Kong people running Hong Kong but Hong Kong tycoons running Hong Kong."

Mr Tung's decision to make suspension of labour laws the first task for a new legislature reflects the power of the ascendant business lobby.

"Now the handover has happened, the businessmen are getting their revenge," said Mr Lee, who leads the Confederation of Trade Unions, a smaller, more vociferous rival to the FTU. "The business sector has complete control of the current administration. They have nothing to worry about."

Laws enshrining collective bargaining and other trade union rights have not been repealed, the government says, merely frozen pending review. But this suggests only a ruse to deflect criticism.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions condemned the freezing of new rights as "a slap in the face for Hong Kong workers, who were the source of Hong Kong's economic miracle".

Gun law returns to haunt Karachi

Suzanne Goldenberg

THEY came in and sat down opposite his desk like any other prospective clients. Naveed Hussein, an architect, rose to fetch water and rejoined his guests. The two men pulled out guns and shot him.

He survived, and is now under police guard in Karachi's Aga Khan hospital. But he has been left unable to speak and his vision is blurred.

Nobody has been arrested for the attack, on July 8, or for the murder a few days earlier of the head of the electricity board. In a city long accustomed to violence, the attacks are seen as an omen: demons that have nearly destroyed the city in the past decade are taking on a new form.

Karachi has seen it all in the 13 years since the Mohajir Quami Movement was created: from ethnic unrest through ruthless police repression to internecine feuding. The MQM, which claims to represent Muslims who arrived after Pakistan's independence and the division of British India 50 years ago, launched a struggle which quickly descended into violent protests, and then sheer terror.

Now the men of violence appear to have found new masters in the powerful mafias that profit from the Karachi administration's failure to provide basic services: housing, transport, employment, and even water.

Mr Hussein had dared to challenge Karachi's powerful mafia ruling the construction industry. He prodded bureaucrats to enforce zoning bylaws and take action against land grabbers.

"I asked him if he could guess who it was and he said 'no' because he had been threatened so many times before," said his brother, Mazdak, a newspaper columnist.

After February's elections, when the MQM joined the governing coalition in Sindh province, the people of Karachi hoped the peace brought by a police crackdown in 1995 would hold. Once the MQM had a slice of power, they thought, it would be in its interests to tame the gunmen who have held Karachi hostage.

But that did not happen. With the MQM in power, the gates of Karachi's central prison opened. Many of the hundreds who walked free had been jailed on trumped-up charges during the 1995 repression of the MQM. Others were not so innocent, and were determined to take revenge.

"You have gunmen for hire," said Mazdak.

About 270 people have died in the city since February, and the police appear unable to cope. The release of the militants, and the arrest of four senior officers on charges of rights abuses, have disheartened the force, says Yusuf Jameel of the citizens' police liaison committee.

"If people lose confidence in our law enforcement agencies, you cannot have rule of law," he said.

The MQM admits that the killing has started again but blames the rise in violence on meddling from Pakistan's intelligence agencies.

In the past two decades, Karachi has suffered relative neglect.

The MQM's war against the state drove industry from the city, deepening an employment crisis and reducing funds available for civic services.

And the mafias have picked up the pieces: supplying water, for a charge, and running public transport. The result has been chaos.

● A policeman who led a crackdown on the MQM was killed in Karachi this week, police said. Aslam Hayat, aged 35, was shot by three gunmen.

Truth that lies buried in Congo's killing fields

Chris McGreal in Bukavu uncovers strong new evidence of genocide

SIX villagers led the way up the narrow path off the main road about 15km from Bukavu, on the far eastern border of the former Zaire. One carried a spade. He knew where he was headed, but the final marker was an arm which rigor mortis had slowly wormed out of the ground to beckon him towards the first of the mounds.

The man went to work with a shovel. He did not have to dig deep to uncover first one, then three, mutilated corpses.

"These ones died slowly. See, he has no eyes. They killed others just over there. Maybe 20 or 30 are buried there."

Two of the villagers witnessed the killings of the three men. They said the victims were Rwandan or Burundian Hutus. "The killers were Tutsis. They weren't from here. They did not speak like us. They had smart uniforms. I'm sure they were Rwandan," said the man with the spade.

The villagers described how the soldiers descended in January. They rounded up a few dozen people they believed to be Hutus from across the border, including women and children. Some were allowed to go. The rest were killed. Among them was one of the men in the opened grave. He was hit about the head with a gun. His nose and face were smashed with a rock. Then one of the soldiers pierced his eyes with his bayonet. As he writhed on the ground, the "rebels" turned their attention to the other two men. The villagers were later forced to bury them.

The admission by Rwanda's defence minister and vice-president, General Paul Kagame, that his largely Tutsi army led Laurent Kabila's rebellion in the rechristened Congo has reinforced suspicions that his soldiers also played a leading role in the systematic murder of Hutu refugees — remnants of the 1 million Rwandans who fled into then-Zaire in 1994.

Most were driven home to Rwanda at the outbreak of the rebellion in Zaire in October, but more than 200,000 who headed west were hunted across 1,000 miles of then-Zairean territory through the eight-month war. Among them were militiamen responsible for the genocide of Rwanda's Tutsis three years ago, but there were also many women and children.

Aid workers and United Nations officials accuse Mr Kabila's troops of sentencing thousands of people to death by exhaustion and hunger. Others were doomed by the many diseases thriving in the Congo basin's rainforests. But there is also growing evidence of killings by military death squads, some led by Rwandan soldiers.

Roberto Garreton, the Chilean lawyer appointed by the UN to investigate allegations of massacres, issued a report this month identifying the sites of 134 mass killings blamed on Mr Kabila's army or those backing it. "The methods used were deliberate, premeditated massacres," said the report.

Mr Kabila's government accuses those refugees who say they witnessed killings of lying. The foreign minister, Bizima Karaha, said the only mass graves in Congo were for the victims of cholera or murders by Hutu extremists.

No one knows how many genuine refugees are missing, let alone the number dead. The UN says more than 40,000 people are unaccounted for around Kisangani alone.

The European Union and the United States have said future aid to the bankrupt country — its coffers long plundered by the exiled, ailing despot Mobutu Sese Seko — depends on full co-operation with the UN investigation. That did not stop Mr Kabila blocking it while demanding Mr Garreton's removal. The UN has bowed to the pressure. A new investigator is expected to be appointed shortly, but the delay has bought more time to destroy evidence.

Around Bukavu, forces fighting for Mr Kabila killed several hundred Rwandan and Burundian Hutus at Chimanga camp, 40km from the city, in November.

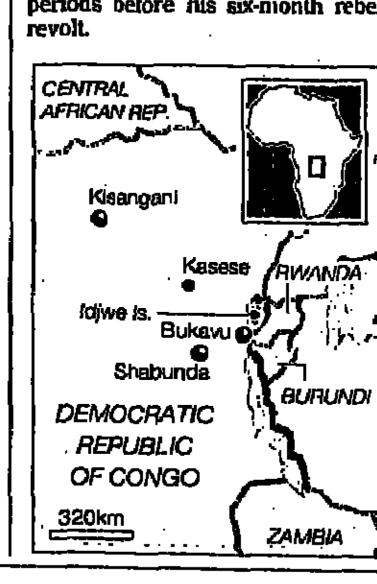
Among the main killing fields is Shabunda, where there are eye-witness accounts of Rwandan-led squads carrying out summary executions of Hutu men. A Rwandan army officer, known to UN officials as Commander Jackson, identifies himself as "The Exterminator". He is said to have boasted his mission was to pursue Hutu refugees.

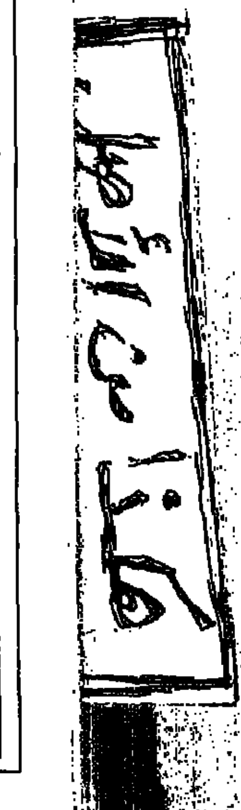
Credible witnesses report at least three mass graves in the Shabunda area, thought to contain the corpses of thousands of people, including children and babies.

Aid agencies say they were duped into laying a trap for refugees around Shabunda by encouraging them to come out of the forest for food.

The United Nations tribunal on Rwanda's genocide said it seized seven suspects in Nairobi last week, including a former prime minister, Jean Kambanda.

● The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan this week agreed to an investigation into massacres in former Zaire that date back to March 1, 1993. Mr Kabila had refused to allow the investigation unless it covered periods before his six-month rebel revolt.





GUARDIAN WEEKLY July 27 1997

Burma's nationalist hero was killed 50 years ago this month. **Fergal Keane** uncovers new evidence about one of the most catastrophic murders of modern times

Was Britain behind Aung San's death?

IN THE heart of Rangoon, among the mildewed remains of the long-gone colonial age, is a building where one of the most fateful crimes of the post-colonial era was enacted. A vast rectangular construction of red stone with a guard post at each corner, it is fringed by thick vegetation, giving it the appearance of a lost temple that has burst out of Rangoon's urban jungle.

When the British ruled Burma this was the seat of imperial power. The great red building, known as the Secretariat, was where Burma's nationalist hero, Aung San, and five of his ministers were murdered at 10.37 in the morning of July 19, 1947, during a cabinet meeting. With his murder Burma was plunged into political chaos, the ultimate result of which would be the ride to power of the military and decades of isolation and repression.

When he died, Aung San left behind a two-year-old daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, who would go on to become leader of the country's National League for Democracy and who is now the worldwide symbol of resistance to military oppression in Burma. She has made frequent references to her father's influence on her life: "When I was under house arrest I used to look up at his picture and imagine that he was here with me and that it was the two of us against them," she once said. Suu Kyi believes passionately that her father's death robbed Burma of the prospect of peace.

There is substantial evidence to support her case. For 50 years Burma has been racked by civil war, ethnic conflict and military repression. But in 1947, with Aung San as leader, the prospects looked bright. He was 32 years old when he died, but he had packed a lot into his short life. Dedicated to independence since his student days, he was a prominent member of the most radical nationalist group known as the "Thakins" — "master" — the word used by Burmese to address their British superiors.

When the war in Europe started Thakin leaders were detained. Aung San stowed away, bound for China, to contact Mao Zedong. Instead he was picked up by Japanese intelligence and taken to Tokyo.

The Japanese wanted to invade Burma, to close the supply route to their Chinese enemies, and to open their own route to India. Aung San co-operated, believing he would thereby achieve an independent Burma. He became commander of the Burma Independence Army, which was to fight alongside the Japanese and that other enemy of the British Empire, Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army.

In January 1942, he joined the Japanese invasion: the British retreated in chaos. But the Japanese military administration proved ruthless, and the independence granted in August 1943 was on paper only. Aung San was deeply dissatisfied and planned to join the Allies. Churchill was appalled. He regarded Aung San as the "traitor rebel of a quisling army". But Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in South-east Asia, regarded Aung San as a potentially useful asset against the retreating Japanese. So it was that 30-year-old Aung San led the Burmese national army across to the British just in time for victory in Rangoon.

At the end of the war Aung San was indisputably the most significant figure in Burmese politics. In 1947, he negotiated Burma's independence from Britain with Clement Attlee. His assassination was one of the most catastrophic political murders of modern times — in relative terms more destructive even than the killing of John F Kennedy. And, like that more famous death, it is also shrouded in mystery.

The official history says a rival Burmese politician motivated by revenge and jealousy killed Aung San. But recently declassified British government documents and new witnesses have thrown new light on the mystery.

What is not disputed is that Aung San and his cabinet members were killed by gunmen who then returned cheering to the house of a former Burmese prime minister, U Saw.

Carlyle Seppings, the British CID officer who arrested U Saw, remembers his coolness. "He was sitting in his armchair sipping whisky. When I burst in through the door all he said was 'There must be some mistake, get me the Governor's secretary on the phone at once'."

The police dragged the lake by U Saw's house and found a large collection of sealed oil drums filled with automatic weapons and ammunition, enough for a small army and certainly part of a planned seizure of power. These weapons and the guns that killed Aung San and his cabinet were soon traced to thefts arranged by two serving British army officers, Captain David Vivian and Major Henry Young. But the plot went far wider than this.

From his prison cell, U Saw smuggled out secret letters to Captain Vivian. In one he asked for advice in contacting what he termed "the tall gentleman". Vivian replied that they should wait. The police had been monitoring this correspondence and now decided to force U Saw's hand. They faked a letter from another accomplice advising that the "tall gentleman" be contacted immediately, whereupon U Saw wrote a letter to John Stewart Bingley, the British Council representative in Rangoon. He was 6ft 3in tall.



Aung San, far right, with his wife and family including, front, his daughter Aung San Suu Kyi, now leader of Burma's democracy movement

The contents of the letter were explosive: in it U Saw threatened to make "disclosures that would have international repercussions". He sounded an even more ominous note in a later letter when he demanded Bingley's assistance on the grounds that he had "taken a grave risk as advised".

Before the assassination, Bingley had been spending a lot of time with U Saw. According to Major Young, Bingley had told U Saw at a tea party: "You know, we're all ready to support you". Bingley claimed diplomatic immunity and was eventually allowed to leave Burma.

Meanwhile Carlyle Seppings was turning up evidence of the involvement of other British officers, but was ordered to stop his investigation. The police chief told him: "This is getting too big for both you and me, and if we are not careful we are going to tread on some very important corns." U Saw was convicted of conspiracy to murder and sentenced to death. He always publicly denied his guilt.

Two days before the execution, Seppings went to visit him in prison to ask why he had not fled after the murders. "U Saw told me he expected to be given the job of prime minister after Aung San was dead. He said 'Government House told me things would be all right'." U Saw was hanged on May 1, 1948.

AFTER the hanging came the trial of Captain Vivian, charged with arranging arms thefts and conspiracy with U Saw. Vivian claimed darkly "someone in England is interested in seeing me put away and not allowed to talk. If I could tell the facts there would be a huge rumpus between the British and the Burmese".

He was convicted and sentenced to five years but escaped the following year. Files on Captain Vivian show many of the official papers on him are still secret. After pressure, the Foreign Office did release them but with heavy deletions. Vivian died in Swansea in 1971. His son says he left papers with his solicitor with instructions for them to be burned at his death, so we will never know Vivian's full story.

One file on the affair in the Public Record Office was made available in 1996. In a top secret memo to Whitehall by the British ambassador in Rangoon, Carlyle Seppings's former boss, Tun Hla Oung, is reported as being "now virtually convinced that there was British connivance in the assassinations". Tun Hla Oung believes U Saw was working with British support for the overthrow of Aung San's government. He thinks John Stewart Bingley was the middleman between U Saw and a powerful group of people in London led by a former Governor of Burma and Conservative cabinet minister, Sir Reginald Dorman Smith.

Two days after the assassination, the Labour MP Tom Driberg stood up in the House of Commons and said: "The moral guilt of the assassinations attaches less, perhaps, to the brutal gunmen in Rangoon than to the comfortable Conservative gentlemen here who incited U Saw to treachery and sabotage."

Prime Minister Attlee was then pressed by Eden to confirm that the Tory Opposition had "no connection with this outrage". Attlee replied that "nobody would believe" there was any connection.

And no one did. Until now. Other documents released by the Foreign Office reveal a conspiratorial group of Conservative politicians, soldiers and other public figures who were devoted to the overthrow of the government of independent Burma before and after the transfer of power in 1948.

The documents show that the group — the Friends of the Burma Hill Peoples — was formed in February 1947, five months before Aung San was killed and when U Saw was in London as part of the independence negotiating team. One of the founding members was Frank Owen, editor of the Daily Mail. The connections between this group and U Saw's plotting to kill Aung San are disturbingly close.

The key figure was Sir Reginald Dorman Smith, who had ruled the country through U Saw when he was prime minister there during the war. When Dorman Smith returned to Burma as governor after the war he had refused to deal with Aung San. This refusal, and his personal hatred of the nationalist leader, led to his recall to London in 1946.

THE group believed in separate independence for some of Burma's ethnic minorities, especially the Karens, who had been adamant on gaining independence from Burma since the end of the war, and not without reason. In 1942, when Aung San led the Burmese Independence Army into Burma with the Japanese, many Karens remained loyal to the British. Aung San's troops massacred whole villages, creating an appalling legacy of distrust which survives to this day.

After the war, Aung San and others argued that the Karens had been detached from the rest of the Burmese people and that separating the nations would be disastrous. The Attlee government agreed but many in Conservative circles did not.

Dorman Smith and his friends felt strongly that they should not let down their loyal wartime allies. They also felt that Aung San and the nationalist leadership might take Burma into the communist bloc, whereas the Karens would unquestionably remain pro-Western. The territory the Karens claimed, Karenistan, included some of Burma's richest mineral and metal deposits.

The Friends thought they were pursuing a noble cause. But if they were involved in the killing of Aung San, as the evidence suggests, they were responsible for the single most damaging act in the history of Burma. It is a lesson we would do well to remember: that today's repression can be rooted in yesterday's short-sighted political manipulation.

U Saw (left) was sitting in his armchair sipping whisky. He said: 'There must be some mistake, get me the Governor's secretary at once'

Martin Walker is on holiday

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Dearing report marks end of free higher education

THE CHERISHED ideal of free higher education for all has finally been abandoned with the Government accepting the central findings of the Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, which is likely to recommend that students should contribute towards the costs of their university tuition.

University tuition ceased to be "free" many years ago when the value of the state's maintenance grant was pegged and a loan scheme introduced to cover the shortfall. Most graduates now leave university with a debt to be repaid once they get jobs.

In future, however, students will also be required to pay £1,000 a year towards the cost of their tuition but, to soften the impact, the Government is expected to exempt those whose parents earn less than £16,000. It may also exempt trainee teachers and doctors, to encourage young people into the caring professions.

A sliding scale of fees will operate where parental incomes are between £16,000 and £34,000, at which point the full £1,000 becomes payable. A middle-class backlash cannot be ruled out, and some complained that "New Labour, New Mortgage" was not what they voted for on May 1. Overall, however, the Dearing plans were greeted with a sense of inevitability.

For those whose parents cannot or will not shoulder the burden, a new loan scheme will allow students to borrow up to £3,000 a year, so graduates could start their working lives with a debt of around £10,000 to repay. Even so, the extra money raised — £1 billion by 2002 — falls far short of the higher education funding gap. This already stands at £2 billion, and university vice-chancellors and principals threatened at one stage to impose their own "top-up" fees without waiting for the Dearing report.

A NEW system of retirement pensions will be in place before the next general election if a wide-ranging policy review comes up with some workable solutions for eventually reducing reliance on the state pension which, at its basic level, is now worth only £62.45 for a single person or £99.80 for a couple.

The review will focus on ways of ensuring that more people have a second-tier pension. Central to this is the idea of a "stakeholder" scheme under which the private sector would offer approved, low-cost and flexible arrangements to suit the needs of individuals who have no occupational pensions.

"Citizenship" pensions are planned for those who spend their lives caring for children or dependent relatives and who, for one reason or another, earn too little to be able to contribute to a second pension. The details of this, however, are worryingly vague.

Since pension reform carries much political risk for little political reward, the Government's decision to act was generally considered to be a brave one. But it could be hard to restore public trust in private pensions. That was undermined by the 1980s' scandal over mis-selling and, more recently, by the Chancellor's unexpected budget raid on pension funds.

A LEADING pro-euthanasia doctor, Dr Michael Irwin, admitted helping as many as 50 terminally ill patients to die and provoked the British Medical Association into calling for a murder investigation.

Dr Irwin, of Hove, East Sussex, said he was trying to expose the hypocrisy of the "double effect" principle. "Double effect is where doctors will prescribe pain killers or sedatives so that increasing doses are given to kill the pain and, incidentally, the patient dies." Most good doctors had done this but would "never admit that they have given it to honour a patient's request to die".

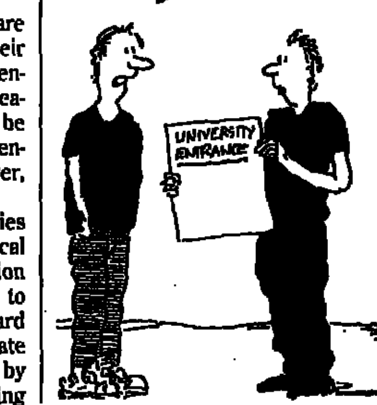
Dr Irwin, who is chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, is campaigning for a change in the 1961 Suicide Act, which makes it an offence for a doctor to aid or abet suicide. But the BMA, at its conference earlier this month, voted to oppose legalising euthanasia.

THE campaigning Data Protection Registrar, Elizabeth France, called on the public to be more assertive about challenging government and commercial agencies, which were amassing an unprecedented amount of information on individuals.

Although organisations that hold personal information on computers are legally required to register with the Data Protection Agency, Mrs France complained that security and intelligence services refused to, claiming exemption on grounds of "national security". This denied the public the right to know what information was held about them.

CRIMINAL charges are to be brought against the Milford Haven Port Authority and its harbour master, Clive Andrews, for their role in the Sea Empress oil tanker disaster in February last year, when more than 58,000 tonnes of crude oil spilled on to the Pembrokeshire coast.

An inquiry blamed the inexperience and lack of training of the harbour pilot, the failure to use enough tugs, and "confrontation" between pilots and the port authority.



GP fundholding under the knife

Chris Mihill

THE two-tier system of GP fundholding will be scrapped from next April, ending one of the most controversial Tory reforms.

Fundholding doctors with their own budgets will no longer be able to buy care for their patients ahead of equally sick patients from non-fundholding practices.

The Health Secretary, Frank Dobson, said that in future patients could be sure they would be admitted to hospital on the basis of clinical need alone, not who was paying.

"This is the beginning of the end of the two-tier NHS. This Government's manifesto commitment is to a health service where access is based on need and need alone — not on your ability to pay or who your GP happens to be.

"It is also good news for doctors and other NHS staff, many of whom have found the unfair two-tier system repugnant to administer."

Mr Dobson said NHS chief executive Alan Langlands would be writing to health authority and trust chief executives telling them that trusts must continue to operate a common waiting list for urgent admissions regardless of who is commissioning the care.

In addition, health authorities must have maximum waiting time standards common to all patients. Within that common standard the admission of residents for non-urgent treatment must be solely on the basis of clinical priority.

"At present a health authority or GP fundholder can make contracts with a hospital to treat patients in a certain time. This means sometimes clinical priority goes out of the window and patients are admitted just to meet contracts," Mr Dobson said.

"We want to ensure that hospitals give preference to urgent patients over the needs of non-urgent patients", he said.

The announcement was welcomed by the British Medical Association, which stressed that equity should not be delivered at the expense of quality. Ian Bogle, chairman of the association's family doctor committee, said: "This is an opportunity for levelling up, not levelling down."

● London's health services need a watchdog agency to ensure high-quality services across the capital, the King's Fund, an independent health think-tank, said.

In addition, a capital-wide agency was needed to co-ordinate Private Finance Initiative hospital schemes, so buildings were placed where they were most useful, rather than health authorities each commissioning projects.



Camilla Parker Bowles arriving at Highgrove with her brother-in-law Simon Elliot PHOTO: BARRY BATCHELOR

Highgrove party sparks debate on accession

PRINCE Charles put his relationship with his lover Camilla Parker Bowles on a public footing last week when he threw a lavish party to celebrate her 50th birthday at his mansion in Gloucestershire, *writes Susie Steiner.*

Mrs Parker Bowles, wearing a navy sleeveless silk dress with a diamond and pearl necklace, was first to arrive for the five-course dinner, held in a marquee in Highgrove's grounds.

The party has been interpreted as an attempt to bring their relationship into the open. But it has intensified debate over the prince becoming head of the Church of England on accession to the throne, and whether he can maintain such a position after having admitted a 25-year adulterous relationship.

The Labour MP Tony Wright, who chairs a Commons all-party group on the constitution, said the question of marriage had to be resolved. Speaking on BBC radio, he suggested the Church of England "live with" the prince's choice of lifestyle.

However, the Rev John Hawthorne, vicar of Tetbury, near Highgrove, said: "I do not see how he could be Defender of the Faith of a church whose laws he is ignoring, being an admitted adulterer."

Parents, how are you hanging?

Sarah Boseley

HOW DO you know if you have been insulted by a teenager? Unless you are under 20 yourself, it is hard to know whether to cuff them round the ear or give them a kiss, but if they call you a grundy, ferret, fake or a spoon, do not respond with a weak smile.

Teen-speak changes so fast that it can make a parent eggy (stressed) and chonged (tired) just trying to get their head around it, even after a bonkers (fun) day at the office when you might have come home buzzing or dogs! (excellent).

If your little bundle of joy asks you how you are hanging, stay cool. She is inquiring after your emotional welfare, and the correct reply is either high (happy) or low (sad).

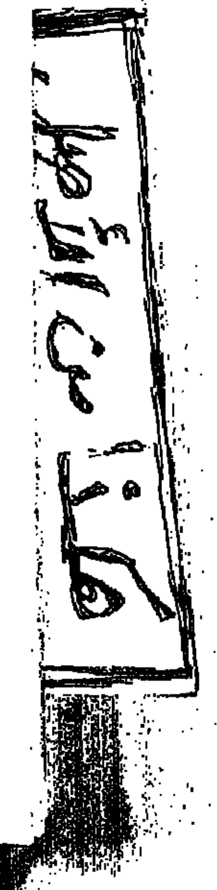
When the lad comes in late and cannot speak, you may have clicked him sconned on peeve — caught him drunk on alcohol. Don't worry if he asks you for snash or scran, he wants money, not drugs, and you can always say no.

This insight into the language of teenagers comes from a survey of 800 schoolchildren aged 11 to 18 by Dillons and Oxford Dictionaries. They found an abundance of insults as well as big regional variations. Even those on the Planet Teen will not always understand each other.

In Glasgow, you might be called a minghawk, in Peterborough or Poole, skanky, in Brighton, scrag, or in Exeter, mong. None of them is flattering. Lush, totty, gorge, lagging and fine are compliments. Skank, munt and rank are not — they mean horrible, unattractive, and truly awful.

Jennie Miell from Oxford Dictionaries said the list included some words which were being revived by the young, including spoon — idiot — a word first recorded with that meaning in 1799.

"A similar survey last year reported a quite different set of words, which underlines how changeable teenage slang tends to be. At this stage it is impossible to predict which words or usage will become sufficiently established for inclusion in a dictionary."



Bad teachers face fast-track sacking

Donald MacLeod and John Carvel

INCOMPETENT teachers will face the sack within a month, it was disclosed last week, as the Government steps up its purge on poor performance in the classroom. The plan, which outraged teachers' unions, is being drawn up for inclusion in Labour's flagship Education Bill.

Fast-track methods of removing unsatisfactory teachers will include a new category of "gross incompetence", which could lead to dismissal in a month.

Thousands of incompetent teachers could be removed in six months under the streamlined procedures drawn up by local education authorities and civil servants. At present capability proceedings can take up to two years and are little used.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has changed its rules to make it harder for inspectors to duck tough verdicts on teachers.

Meanwhile local authorities will be given a bigger role in triggering incompetency proceedings for both classroom staff and head teachers because school governing bodies have been reluctant to use their powers to dismiss staff.

The School Standards Minister, Stephen Byers, welcomed the proposals in a letter to Graham Lane, education chairman of the Local Government Association. But he made it clear the group must achieve its objective of a streamlined system even if unions did not agree.

Mr Lane said gross incompetence was rare. "It is when a teacher is clearly totally incapable of handling a class."

The head teacher should interview the member of staff concerned with his or her union representative and issue a final warning. In less extreme cases of incompetence teachers would be given a chance to improve within the proposed six month period.

The chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, angered teachers with claims there were 15,000 incompetent teachers in schools. Ofsted inspectors identified only 88 last year.

Under current rules, inspectors grade lessons on a seven-point scale. They are obliged to tell heads when they find a first-class teacher with a majority of lessons in grades one or two (excellent or very good). They must also identify the worst teachers whose lessons score six or seven (poor or very poor).

From September, inspectors will for the first time report to heads on the performance of all their staff without having to give reasons to the teachers.

Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, said it was another stick to beat teachers. "We are going to see a crude system of judge-and-run by Ofsted inspectors, often basing their views on visits of between 10 and 15 minutes to each lesson. Everyone agrees that incompetent teachers should be appropriately dealt with, but setting up such a crude system is an insult to the professionalism of most teachers."



Mud bath . . . Glastonbury festival goers wallow in the mud which is suspected to be the source of outbreak of the *E.coli* infection following last month's festival PHOTOGRAPH: [illegible]

Blair dampens down hopes of wider PR

Ewen MacAskill

TONY BLAIR is determined to dash Liberal Democrat hopes of introducing proportional representation for Westminster elections, in spite of agreeing to it for the European Parliament.

As the Cabinet last week approved a PR voting system for the European Parliament election in 1999, government sources stressed it should not be interpreted as a move towards PR for Westminster.

Mr Blair was said to be implacably hostile to the idea of PR for Westminster and hoped that the European Parliament concession will be enough to placate the Liberal Democrats. His distaste for PR is so strong that he was on the verge of vetoing it for the European Parliament.

Downing Street said a manifesto commitment will be honoured by setting up a commission in the autumn to look at reforming the system for Westminster elections. A referendum on changing the British electoral system will be held in the lifetime of this Parliament, possibly in 1999.

But the prospect of PR replacing first-past-the-post for Westminster looks unlikely, given the opposition of the Prime Minister and most of the Cabinet. Only the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, and the Agriculture Minister, Dr Jack Cunningham, support it.

The PR system finally agreed by the Cabinet for the Euro elections is based on regional lists. Instead of constituencies returning one member, the electorate will be lumped into regions and asked to vote for lists of candidates drawn up by the parties.

The Home Secretary, Jack Straw, one of the Cabinet ministers most hostile to PR, said: "I have personally taken the view that you should have a system which is app[illegible] for the body for which the[illegible] are being run. So far as E[illegible] pean elections are concern[illegible] European Parliament is no[illegible] ntive body, so arguments [illegible] strong and weak governme[illegible] arise. It is a representative b[illegible]

● Mr Blair last week paid [illegible] prime ministerial visit to [illegible] tell doubting voters that the [illegible] of the Welsh Office's £7 bi[illegible] get to the proposed elected [illegible] bly will bring more [illegible] improve public services.

Despite doubts that the [illegible] people will back the assem[illegible] so decisively rejected in 19[illegible] Blair's speech in Mid-Glamo[illegible] cluded a prediction of a deci[illegible] vote in the referendum. Bo[illegible] fear a low turn-out.

The Scottish and Welsh [illegible] tion referendums will be [illegible] week apart, on September [illegible] 18, the Government has con[illegible]

Cook sets out ethical policy on global 'evil'

Ian Black and Michael White

PUTTING flesh on the bones of Britain's ethical foreign policy, Robin Cook pledged last week to provide new money for the international war crimes tribunal and to change the rules for exporting riot-control equipment and small arms to oppressive regimes.

Addressing an audience of charities and aid agencies, the Foreign Secretary set out 12 practical points he said could help improve the observance of human rights — a key theme of Labour's global agenda.

"It is not acceptable to try to evade our obligation by pleading that there is too much evil in the world for us to put it right. Our contribution can make a difference," he said in a detailed follow-up of his post-election mission statement.

"If we and our allies maintain international criticism, some regimes will refrain from excesses of violent repression. If we and others encourage reform, some countries will improve their police and justice systems."

He said Britain was donating £330,000 to be spent on building an extra courtroom for the war crimes tribunal in The Hague to speed up its work, and was looking for ways to provide more cash for the Rwanda tribunal.

Mr Cook said the results of a Whitehall-wide review of the criteria used in the licensing of weapons exports, which was started last month, would be published shortly.

"They will result in changes to the present policy governing the licensing of riot-control vehicles, small arms and other equipment for sale to the security forces of certain regimes," he said.

Mr Cook made no mention of Britain's £20 billion Al-Yamamah defence sales deal with Saudi Arabia, a regional ally with a poor human rights record.

The Government later moved to reassure anxious Labour MPs that the proposed £160 million sale of 16 Hawk trainer jets to Indonesia will not finally be decided until the Foreign Office's ethical review of military exports is completed.

The decision relies on a distinction between internal repression and external defence. But some non-governmental bodies say such a distinction misses the point because the purchase of arms confers international respectability.

Mr Cook promised to:

❑ argue for the continued suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth unless there was a radical transformation in its behaviour;

❑ support UN sanctions against Iraq;

❑ back measures to ensure that trade contributed to human rights rather than detracted from them, including efforts to stamp out child labour and exploitation.

Comment, page 12

'New deal' for lone parents

LONE mothers on benefit will not be dragooned into taking jobs against their wishes, Alan Howarth, a minister responsible for welfare-to-work policy, guaranteed on Monday as the Government launched its "new deal" for lone parents, *writes David Brindle*.

He said the Conservatives' "harsh attitude and policies" towards lone parents was a key reason he had defected to Labour from the Conservatives during the last parliament.

"We are not in any way seeking to pressurise people into doing what isn't right for them or their children," Mr Howarth said.

Under the plan, being piloted in eight areas, lone parents living on benefit with school-age children will be "invited" to interview to discuss working with a personal adviser on ways of finding employment.

Ministers are promising improved childcare services to back up the scheme, with details of childcare, training and job opportunities made available on computer in libraries and other public buildings.

Nolan blow to inquiry in[illegible] secret political funding

David Hencke

TONY BLAIR'S election commitment to order an inquiry into secret Conservative party donors has been dealt a severe blow by Lord Nolan, head of the Commission on Standards in Public Life.

He has rejected a request from the Prime Minister to launch a full-scale inquiry into party political funding while he remains chairman of the commission. He stands down in October.

The decision spares the Conservative party from a highly embarrassing inquiry that would highlight again the shadowy world of its foreign supporters. These include the fugitive Asil Nadir and a tranche of foreign millionaire donors from Hong Kong.

One reason for the decision given by some committee members is that the Labour government was trying to bounce the commission into an independent inquiry when the previous administration had already decided to ban foreign donations and end secrecy for British donations above £5,000.

But Lord Nolan is said to have told ministers that his main reason for not undertaking an in[illegible] that he wants instead to [illegible] view of his work over the pa[illegible] years. This will include a [illegible] report into Parliament's ha[illegible] the sleaze issue, the succes[illegible] standards and privileges co[illegible] and the effectiveness of th[illegible] parliamentary register of in[illegible]

● The Commons standa[illegible] privileges committee may b[illegible] reopen hearings into the c[illegible] questions scandal after rece[illegible] 37-page submission from t[illegible] minister, Neil Hamilton, cla[illegible] has suffered a "miscarriage [illegible] tice" over findings by the Par[illegible] tary Commissioner for Stand[illegible]

If he is granted a hearin[illegible] key witnesses, including M[illegible] Al Fayed, the owner of Harr[illegible] the Guardian would be g[illegible] right to present evidence [illegible]

In his submission he says [illegible] evidence . . . is almost en[illegible] admissible, circumstantial [illegible] independently corroborat[illegible] charges ought not to be up[illegible] less the criminal standard [illegible] beyond reasonable doubt [illegible] fied, in view of the [illegible] consequences for the profes[illegible] and personally of a guilty [illegible]

Lottery faces good causes shake-up

Andrew Culf and Rebecca Smithers

THE five original National Lottery good causes could receive 30 per cent less than they expected because of government plans to divert £1 billion into health and education.

Lottery experts said this week that the creation of the sixth good cause — the New Opportunities Fund — would have a severe impact on the arts, charities, national heritage, millennium and sport in the three years ending in 2001.

Luke FitzHerbert, author of the independent National Lottery Yearbook, said they were likely to receive about £130 million a year each instead of the £200 million they had been expecting, following this week's publication of the white paper, The People's Lottery.

Chris Smith, the Culture, Media and Sport Secretary, said the package "would mark a turning point in the fortunes of the National Lottery. It will make it even more popular and even more relevant to people's lives".

He said the sixth good cause and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts (Nesta) would receive £1 billion by 2001 — but the five good causes would still receive £1.8 billion each over the current seven-year lottery licence.

The additional stream of funding was made possible by the extra revenue generated by the midweek draw. Mr Smith insisted none of the projects which had been awarded lottery funding would be scrapped.

The white paper appeared to soft-pedal on the manifesto commitment to award the next licence to a not-for-profit operator. It warned against disproportionate profits, but floated the idea of providing incentives for an efficiently run lottery, or a management fee for operating it.

Virginia Bottomley, the former national heritage secretary, said Labour had breached the principle that lottery money should not be spent on projects normally financed by taxation. "The jackpot winners are the Treasury. The successful lottery will be seriously damaged."

The Government says it would welcome proposals for the award of a new licence in 2001 that would maximise the return to good causes and remove unnecessary profits margins. Its aim is to provide an incentive to operate efficiently, encourage the maximum number of competitive bids, and avoid excessive returns to the operator.

Jackson . . . 'Time to declare the innings closed' PHOTOGRAPH: [illegible]

Turbulent dean resigns

THE rancorous dispute at Lincoln Cathedral which has embarrassed the Church of England for nearly a decade is expected to end after Monday's resignation of Dean Brandon Jackson and the predicted departure of his opponent, the Sub-Dean, Rex Davis, *writes Martin Wainwright*.

The resignation should close an episode which has seen the local bishop scorned, the Archbishop of Canterbury defied, and most of the deadly sins attributed to the warring clergy.

Mr Jackson said: "It has become increasingly clear that I have been at the wicket too long . . . The only sensible thing is to declare the innings closed."

Pressure on Canon Davis, aged 63, was immediately stepped up with fresh calls for his departure.

The quarrel, which stemmed from a crude attempt to use Dean Jackson's vigour to clear out a cathedral chapter accused of idleness and complacency, has at least been instrumental in the sweeping reforms of cathedral management now making their way through the church's general synod.

The appointment of the dean was backed by the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, who said with some satisfaction that there would be "blood on the floor" of her native county's cathedral when he had finished.

But Dean Jackson's assault on the chapter's ruling canons — ranging from claims of incompetence over a money-losing tour by Lincoln's original of Magna Carta to charges that the cathedral needed "exorcising of evil" — foundered on the fact that they, like him, could not be sacked.

Blacks 'lose out' under Blair

Alan Travis

LABOUR is not giving black and Asian people a big enough role in Tony Blair's new Britain, according to the country's leading race equality campaigner.

Sir Herman Ouseley, chief executive of the Commission for Racial Equality, has told race activists privately: "Just look around the inner circle [of Cabinet]. Who do you see there? It is not happening. There is no visibility. In the outer circle there are only one or two people. The frustration is building up."

Leading anti-racist campaigners are frustrated because Labour has hit the ground running on many other issues.

The commission's chief executive is thought to have been encouraged by isolated initiatives since May. Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, asked for the commission's help with the higher echelons of the Foreign Office, which are "very white and very male", and with the shortage of black faces among career diplomats. There are only 190 ethnic minority Britons among the 5,900 Foreign Office employees, none in senior management.

But Labour's black and Asian MPs are also critical of the almost total lack of ethnic minority faces among the very senior civil service. The latest Cabinet Office figures show there are only two black or Asian people in the top four grades of the Civil Service. In the next grade there are only 58 ethnic minority people out of 3,000 Whitehall policy makers.

Some of Labour's black and Asian MPs want race equality higher on the agenda. They have been disappointed by the lack of a blueprint and contrast the Government's inaction with President Clinton's strong support for affirmative action programmes.

Historic ruling frees jailed teenager

Clare Dyer

A 500-year-old law under which a youth was jailed for life for murdering a policeman, although he was 100 yards away from the stabbing and in handcuffs, looks likely to be changed by the five law lords who freed him last week.

Philip English's conviction for the murder of Sergeant Bill Forth in Gateshead in March 1993 was overturned by the Court of Appeal after the House of Lords ruled that he should not have been convicted.

The policeman was stabbed by a friend of English, Paul Weddle, then aged 25, and the youth claimed he was unaware that Weddle had a knife.

English was aged 15 at the time of the killing and is believed to be the youngest person convicted of murdering a policeman.

Emerging from Moorlands Young Offender Institution near Doncaster, South Yorkshire, a pale and dazed Philip English said: "It has been hard inside, very hard. I'm not bothered about compensation. It's the family I've got to thank more than anyone else in the world for keeping up the fight to get me out."

His release follows a long campaign by his stepmother, Mandy English, who was "ecstatic" at the outcome.

The ruling is a landmark decision on the complex law of "joint enterprise", the same law under which Derek Bentley was executed in 1953 for the murder of a policeman by Christopher Craig. The Criminal Case Review Commission will decide in two months whether the Bentley case should go back to the Court of Appeal.

There was an international outcry 10 years ago when six residents of the black township Sharpeville who were part of a mob were sentenced to death for the murder of three councillors whose killers were unknown, under a similar South African law.

Criminal law experts believe the law lords will narrow the very wide ambit of the law, which has developed piecemeal through cases going back to the 15th century.

Under the doctrine of joint enterprise, if two or more people set out on a venture together and the secondary party envisages that his partner might do serious harm, both are guilty of murder if death results.

Sgt Forth was stabbed after answering a call to a dispute between Weddle and his girlfriend at a house on the Cloverhill estate in Gateshead. English and Weddle became involved in a stick fight with the victim and another policeman.

English struck Sgt Forth, who was tackling Weddle, with a fencing stave, but ran away when chased by the other officer. He was in a nearby street under arrest when Weddle stabbed Sgt Forth nine times in the chest.

English's solicitor, Adrian Clarke, said the law should be clarified so that a secondary party would not be liable for a stabbing by a co-defendant if use of a knife was entirely outside his contemplation.

In Brief

SURGING consumer confidence in British beef has put sales back to pre-BSE levels for the first time since autumn 1995.

BARONESS Thatcher plans to establish a £1.9 million professorship of economic enterprise at Cambridge university.

MICHAEL STONE has been charged with robbery and burglary after being questioned by police in connection with the murders of Lin and Megan Russell. Police say the charges are not linked with the murders.

MINISTERS disregarded the latest threat to the millennium celebrations after Greenpeace activists warned that the planned £750,000 PVC dome in Greenwich, south London will be poisonous and that protesters may disrupt its construction.

SIR JAMES Goldsmith has died in Spain at the age of 64. The Referendum Movement he founded will be led by Lord McAlpine, former Conservative party treasurer and deputy chairman. Obituary, page 21

AUDREY JONES, aged 75, died and 12 were injured when a hot air balloon exploded after hitting power lines near the Humber Bridge.

PUBLISHING millionaire Paul Hamlyn is to donate about £17 million towards an ambitious project to cover London's South Bank Centre with an enormous glass canopy designed by Richard Rogers.

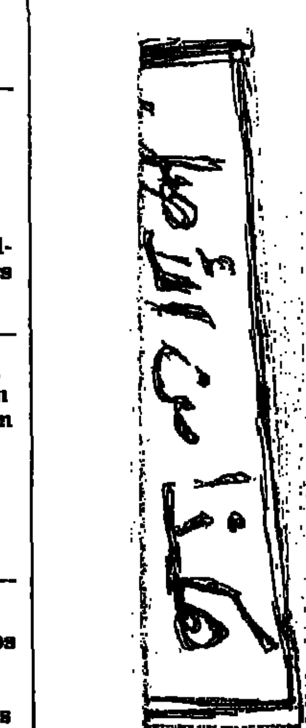
THE SCOTTISH Roman Catholic Church's anti-abortion scheme, which offers money to those who decide to keep their babies, has helped its first mother, a 15-year-old girl.

SPEED cameras have led to a 70 per cent reduction in fatal accidents in a west London trial, prompting calls for extra cash to increase their use.

THE London Borough of Hackney has been ordered to make a record payout of £172,000 to David Chan, a Chinese-origin valuer who was medically retired after being bullied and humiliated by managers because "his face did not fit".

TRANSSEXUALS have won a landmark ruling giving them protection against discrimination for the first time under English law. The Employment Appeal Tribunal accepted that they should be protected by the Sex Discrimination Act.

THE WELSH Office plans to scrap nine out of 45 quangos as part of its aim to popularise devolution, and to demonstrate the proposed Welsh Assembly is not just a talking shop.



How the peace door opened in Ulster

Mary Holland and Patrick Wintour

THE LETTERS two inches high on the front page of the Belfast News summed up the public mood: "Another Chance". This second chance did not arrive by luck but by a mixture of clear strategic thinking and risk taking in Downing Street and Dublin.

The unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire is what Tony Blair and Mo Mowlam, the Northern Ireland Secretary, have been working towards since their election on May 1 — even if the timing of the announcement caught the British government unawares. "There were rumours for a couple of days, but there have been so many that you start to give up listening to them," one minister said.

Even so, the mood at Chequers and the Northern Ireland Office was not one of jubilation but steady determination to take events by the day.

The trail leading to the restoration of the ceasefire started properly on May 16 when Mr Blair flew to Belfast for his first big speech since becoming prime minister, symbolically putting Ireland at the top of his agenda. He said he was willing to authorise a limited number of meetings between his officials and Sinn Fein to explore the terms of a ceasefire and possible terms for Sinn Fein's entry into talks. But he also laid bare his uncertainties about Sinn Fein's motives. Was the IRA's first ceasefire "a tactic in an otherwise unbroken armed conflict, or was it a search for a new way forward?" he asked aloud.

He also set out his determination that the settlement train was leaving, with or without Sinn Fein. It was up to them to decide whether they wanted to climb aboard.

Two meetings between Sinn Fein and government officials were then held, the first on May 21, the second a week later. A crucial aide memoir of these May meetings was sent to Sinn Fein on June 13, summarising the concessions Labour was prepared to make. First, the Government specified that Ms Mowlam would decide with the security forces if Sinn Fein could be allowed into talks after six weeks of a ceasefire. John Major had refused to specify such a timeframe. Second, the talks process itself would be time-limited, ending in May next year. Mr Major had again refused to set a timeframe. Proposals on when the IRA and other paramilitary organisations might be required to hand over weapons were left unclear, save to say an independent body would be established and decommissioning would occur in parallel with talks.

Yet three days after the dispatch of these generous proposals, the IRA killed two policemen in Lurgan in an unprovoked attack on June 16. Mr Blair felt personally betrayed, as well as revolted by the killings themselves.

But despite the murders, it has emerged that Gerry Adams, the Sinn Fein president, sent a largely positive response four days after Lurgan, on June 20, in reply to the aide memoir of June 13.

On June 24 the British and Irish governments published their long-awaited joint paper on decommissioning which in essence promised that decommissioning would occur in parallel with the substantive talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist response was ambiguous. David Trimble was suspicious that the Anglo-Irish formula left open the possibility that Sinn Fein would not need to hand over weapons until the end of the talks, and maybe not even then.

The next day, Mr Blair nevertheless went to the Commons to outline his decommissioning proposals and tell Sinn Fein again that the peace train would leave without them. It was a critical moment. Mr Blair could have washed his hands of the IRA, in the light of the Lurgan murders, but instead he spelt out the plans on decommissioning, the timetable of mid-September by which substantive talks must start, and his belief Sinn Fein could yet join them.

Following his statement, public attention turned to the growing threat of the marching season, and in particular the severe civil unrest at Drumcree looming over the weekend of July 5-6.

Yet privately the omens were better. On the Wednesday before Drumcree, Martin McGuinness, the Sinn Fein MP, privately wrote to the Northern Ireland Office seeking further clarifications about the decommissioning proposals, by now seen as the final stumbling block to an IRA ceasefire.

On July 8, as nationalist rioting over the Protestant march through Drumcree subsided, the Northern Ireland Office replied to Mr McGuinness. The reply reiterated Mr Blair's Commons statement that political talks would start on September 15 at the same time as the sub-committee on decommissioning weapons met. Sinn Fein was also told the only grounds for its expulsion from the talks would be non-adherence to the Mitchell principles of non-violence. Finally, the paper promised further confidence-building measures, including a review of IRA prisoners.

OH WELL, HERE'S TO THE PROVISIONAL CEASEFIRE.

News of these exchanges was not intended to leak, but Ms Mowlam felt forced to publish them last week once they started to emerge. At one point it looked as if she would be forced to make a Commons statement to explain why such contacts had been continuing, even though she had promised no further clarifications with Sinn Fein were occurring. She was instead saved by the decision of the IRA to announce the restoration of the ceasefire.

It may have been bumpy, but the hard fact is that it has taken two general elections and changes of government in London and Dublin to provide the leadership that brought this new ceasefire into being. The offer from the IRA, to which Mr Blair has responded with courage and determination, was on the table last October when John Hume delivered it to Mr Major. At that time the republican demands were that the decommissioning of arms should not be an obstacle to talks, that there should be a time frame for the negotiations and that there should be "confidence-building" measures, such as on the treatment of prisoners.

Mr Blair's aides for their part believe there have been three elements to his and Ms Mowlam's success. He insisted on plain speaking, saying the same thing to all factions, in public and in private correspondence. He helped isolate the IRA in the United States in the wake of the killing of the two RUC men in Lurgan. Third, he has used his large Commons majority to force the pace in a way in which Mr Major, so dependent on the Unionists for support, felt unable to do.

Even now, Mr Blair will not let up. If Ulster's quarrelsome politicians cannot agree on new structures among themselves by next May, "the two governments will continue to pursue a rapid progress to an overall agreed settlement, acceptable to both Unionists and nationalists". If the inter-party talks fail, London and Dublin will put a political settlement to a referendum in both parts of Ireland, cutting the ground from under the extremists.

Mr Blair has to persuade Mr Trimble not to walk out over decommissioning. There are already signs Mr Trimble may accept this. He has been careful to stop short of the pledges already made by the Rev Ian Paisley and Bob McCartney, Unionist MP for Down North, that they will not talk to Sinn Fein.

Trust, like peace itself, will take a long time to build. The ceasefire is just the beginning. — *The Observer*

Adams's ascendancy, page 12

Fatal love in a land torn apart by hatred

David Sharrock on the latest sectarian killing in Northern Ireland

THIS is a Northern Irish love story, of the type known here as "love across the barricades". It begins at the end, with the burial of Bernadette Martin in Craigavon last week, among flowers and tears and the usual pleas for tolerance.

Eighteen-year-old Bernadette loved 19-year-old Gordon Greene. The two were inseparable and it made their families happy to see such a thing in their country, where hatred, fear and ignorance so often separate Catholic neighbour from Protestant friend.

Bernadette met Gordon last year at work at Avondale Foods, a food-processing factory in Lurgan, which makes sandwiches for Marks & Spencer. They might have married, settled to raise children, and lived their lives in unremarkable peace.

But that option was not open to them, because Bernadette and Gordon had broken the most important taboo of Ulster's two tribes: to love one another in spite of different religious allegiances.

About 9 per cent of people in Northern Ireland marry across the divide. Many never look back, even though they may be forced to live apart from the communities in which they were raised. There is a hidden map of Northern Ireland upon which every last field, ditch and house is accounted for in sectarian terms. It is buried in people's minds, and where Bernadette and Gordon grew up, on the lush farmland around Lough Neagh, its hold is strong.

Gordon lives in Aghalee, a pretty village decked out at this time of year in red, white and blue bunting, declaring itself British. Earlier this month, it hosted the Co Antrim Orange Order's Twelfth of July demonstration. Most homes fly a Union flag, but not Gordon Greene's.

It is rumoured that the village has proved to be fertile recruiting ground for the Loyalist Volunteer Force, Northern Ireland's fastest growing paramilitary force, although the area's Ulster Unionist MP, Jeffrey Donaldson, attacks the media for slurring the reputation of the majority of decent people who live there.

Bernadette lived in Pinebank, one of the few mixed housing estates in the sprawling "new town" of Craigavon, a mile from Lurgan.

There is a statue of the Virgin Mary in the window of Bernadette's house, and neighbours described the family as "good, decent people".

Given their different backgrounds, Bernadette and Gordon must sometimes have thought of the dangers their relationship put them in from the section of Northern Ireland's population that is neither good nor decent.

"They were just so into each other, they were mad about each other," said a friend of Bernadette. "They were great together. She was beautiful and could have had her pick of men, but it was Gordon she loved. He loved her back; treated her like gold."

There are few places for Catholics and Protestants to mix socially. One is the Cellar, a bar in Lurgan near where two policemen were murdered last month. The young couple, who regularly stayed at each other's houses, would go there, and Gordon was readily welcomed into her mainly Catholic circle of friends.

The two lovers ignored pleas for caution from friends who warned Bernadette about going to Aghalee during the tense weeks surrounding July 12. "She had been getting a lot of verbal sectarian abuse in Aghalee," said one friend. "They were calling her Fenian bitch and things like that, but she didn't seem to care. She was in love."

Gordon's father, John, said that on the evening of July 14 his wife drove into Lurgan to pick the youngsters up from Bernadette's home. She was going to stay with them that night because they wanted to go to a country pub and then go in to work together the next morning. "God, if we hadn't gone to collect her, she might be alive."

Gordon and Bernadette left the pub at 11pm and returned to Gordon's home. They were chatting in an upstairs bedroom when his sister Wendy arrived home. She made them all tea and toast, and they sat talking and joking until the early hours when, one by one, they fell asleep fully clothed on the bed.

All the lights were off. At 4am a gunman entered the house, stole up the stairs, entered the room where the teenagers were sleeping and shot Bernadette four times in the head. "They must have been watching," said John Greene. "It was done out of pure hatred . . . I have no doubt that it was sectarian. We'll never get over it. My children will not go up the stairs. My son will not stay at home. He is in pieces."

"We stayed with Bernadette until she died. She was clinically dead on the way, they just kept her alive on a ventilator. Then she just died. It's hard . . . Whoever did that, I have no feelings for them," said Bernadette's father, Laurence Martin.

"I can forgive them, but God might never forgive them. But I do not want any repercussions, people claiming reprisals, and if her death means it is the last death in this country then maybe it is worth something and we can live in peace. But she was special. She was special."

Police have charged a 36-year-old man with Bernadette Martin's murder.

Gordon Greene carrying his girlfriend Bernadette's coffin last week, They had shared a love 'across the barricades' PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN LEWIS

Carpetbaggers stampede building societies

Richard Miles and Lina Saigol

BRITISH building societies are being stampeded by carpetbaggers as savers try to cash in on the prospect of further societies shedding their mutual status for a stock market listing. Windfalls for members have so far totalled £35 billion.

With pressure mounting on the biggest mutual, Nationwide, to convert, MPs from all parties were preparing to call on the Government to act to support societies and warning of dire consequences if they were allowed to disappear.

Societies attracted a record £1.88 billion in savings in June, more than twice the £878 million deposited in May and the highest sum for a decade, according to figures published last week by the Building Societies Association.

The BSA described the influx as a "feeding frenzy" whipped up by speculative reports that the remaining societies were about to convert. The scale of last month's investments is all the more remarkable because two of the biggest players, the Halifax and the Alliance & Leicester, had left the sector to become high-street banks, while the Woolwich floated this month. Northern Rock will join them in October.

June's influx was also spurred on by higher interest rates following a quarter-point rise in base rates at the beginning of the month, the second increase since the general election. For years, savers have had to endure rates of 2 or 3 per cent.

MPs say consumer choice and diversity in the high street will disappear if the building societies are allowed to disappear. Andrew Love, Labour MP for Edmonton and leader of the all-party building societies group, said it was unacceptable that societies' branches were being besieged by people opening accounts in the hope of a bonanza payout.

Nationwide, which has been stalked by carpetbaggers for two months, closed its doors in June to new savings business in an attempt to fend off the speculators looking for windfall payments of up to £1,000. Its fate is likely to be decided at its annual meeting in London this week, when five carpetbaggers, led by freelance butler Michael Hardern, will seek election to its board on a platform of forcing the society to convert. More than one million votes have been cast already.

Brian Davis, Nationwide chief executive, said the response, at three times last year's vote, had been phenomenal. "The Nationwide is run by our members and so we are very pleased by the number of votes we have received as it means the members are getting involved with the issue. However, they need to remember that our competitive pricing position would disappear if we were to convert," he said.

Tipped next for conversion is Birmingham Midshires, which said that all options were open. "Our view is 'never say never', but we are not up for sale and the board has taken no decision on a change in corporate form," it said. Midshires has raised opening balances several times to deter carpetbaggers and has expelled Mr Hardern from its membership.

Building societies such as the Nationwide and Birmingham Midshires have sought to show the value of mutuality — ownership for and by members — by offering consistently better interest rates on mortgages and savings accounts. A £50,000 interest-only mortgage from the Nationwide costs £13 a month less than a loan from the new banks.

But the prospect of large windfalls has prompted many investors to put pressure on mutuals to convert.

Windfall fever

Building society deposits
£bn, 1997

Month	£bn
January	[illegible]
February	[illegible]
March	-0.93
April	0.61
May	0.88
June	1.84

Source: Building Societies Commission

Money is the root of new morality

Lisa Buckingham and **Julia Finch** on bad old boardroom habits that Labour must root out

IT WAS pure eighties. Peter Middleton — the former head of the Lloyd's of London insurance market and now European chief of US bank Salomons — told the City's bright young Turks they were worth every penny they could squeeze.

At the Lord Mayor's dinner for Young City Professionals the twice-married former monk said it was "immoral and unjust" to deny people the fruits of their labour.

He should know. He earns at least £1 million a year, but that is dwarfed by some of his colleagues at Salomons who command up to £20 million.

But his public statement was surprising, given the recently stated concerns of the Bank of England that huge bonuses now doing the rounds of the Square Mile may create a moral hazard, particularly for younger dealers.

Fine words from the grandees of British boardrooms are echoed by regulators who call for responsible leadership and moderation. But at the same time — and only a fraction less publicly — the production line of riches for the chosen few gathers pace.

Last week a small band of shareholders attempted to call the board of British Telecom to account because three generous incentive schemes are being put into place for directors.

Experts calculate that Sir Peter Bonfield, the chief executive and architect of the MCI fiasco, could be in line for £5 million even if British Telecom's performance makes almost no progress. That is in addition to his annual salary of £500,000, plus a bonus. Last year's totalled £225,000.

Yet Sir Peter's chairman is Sir Iain Vallance, one of the leading lights on the Greenbury Committee whose 1995 report into executive



Middleton: 'immoral' to deny people the fruits of their labour

pay was supposed to extinguish boardroom excess. Sir Iain refuses to participate in the new schemes, but has obviously failed to dissuade his colleagues.

Sir Colin Marshall, the chairman of BT's remuneration committee, claims that the potentially huge rewards are needed to retain the US executives of MCI — even though MCI has never had any similar performance bonuses and its executives look anything but world-class.

Only two days later, Sir Richard Greenbury, the chairman of Marks & Spencer and author of the Greenbury report, was also attracting the attention of eagle-eyed shareholders.

Sir Richard's pay rose by more than £100,000 to £924,000 and remuneration for the total board rose more than £1 million — or 20 per cent — after outside consultants concluded they were underpaid.

However, it was not the pay packets which angered investors, but the installation of a new share scheme which they believe does not stretch the boardroom talents of M&S.

Even the highly regarded former BP boss, Lord Simon of Highbury, who has now been appointed a government minister, has hesitated about forgoing control of £2 million of BP share options.

Such instances undermine the claim that British business is no longer behaving badly. Bosses have always argued that they need cash incentives to work at their peak, but rarely accept that the same principle should apply throughout the company.

This has been contested by the trade unions, but their case has been given extra impetus with recent research from the United States, which suggests that shareholders should look long and hard at chief executive pay as a potential performance indicator.

One recent US report showed that companies where the chief executive's salary was felt to be unfairly high suffer well above average staff turnover — which indicates low morale and is costly to all businesses.

A second piece of research from the Wharton Business School shows that companies that pay their chief executives too much more often perform badly in terms of profits and share price.

This point is recognised by few employers. One notable exception is John Lewis, the partnership retailer. Recently chairman Stuart Hampson pointed out that if it is in a company's interests to invent a lucrative incentive scheme to make the boss feel motivated, it has to be worthwhile to do the same for all employees. John Lewis has just shelled out bonuses of 20 per cent a head from the boardroom down to the shop floor.

Several recent remuneration agreements show what many had feared following publication of the Greenbury report — that share option schemes would be replaced by potentially more generous long-term incentive programmes, many of which have turned out to be disappointingly undemanding of the boardroom.

Even where shareholders have sanctioned what looked like reasonable schemes, it is not unknown — look only at Laura Ashley — for directors to change the rules halfway through the year when it appears they will not reach the targets set.

All this has been going on as the ethical climate of Britain has shifted with the arrival of a new Labour government — one of whose first tasks was to send a message to industry that the "snouts in the trough" culture would no longer be tolerated. The directors of lottery operator Camelot were singled out as examples even though their remuneration was comparatively modest and they had met tough performance requirements.

This signal does not appear to have filtered into other boardrooms, where it is argued that more is needed for motivation and to keep up with counterparts abroad.

The argument for international parity is most often used in relation to City jobs and bonuses, as bankers and traders have a large degree of mobility and the huge US banks have set the recruitment pace. But research by the financial recruitment group, Robert Walters Associates, disputes that. It showed that the recent City bonuses were a record and points out that "the UK pays considerably more than other countries; the same job in the US pays up to 25 per cent more in the UK".

Even part-time directors — the non-executives who are supposed to represent shareholders' interests and monitor boardroom behaviour — have joined the bonanza. Douglas Hurd, the former foreign secretary, is earning £250,000 a year for a few days a week at NatWest Markets, the troubled investment banking subsidiary of the NatWest Bank. His former cabinet colleague, Norman Lamont, is understood to rake in about £200,000 for a two-day week at Rothschild.

If the Government can act quickly and decisively over pay at Camelot, possibly it should now examine the continuing excess in other British boardrooms.

Unemployment is falling and wage negotiators have never been slow to link their pay claims to rises at the top — with potentially hugely inflationary consequences.

In Brief

STOCK markets roared to record highs in Britain and the United States. Analysts said shares had been boosted by May's weaker-than-expected earnings figures. The number of people out of work in Britain fell sharply to a seven-year low.

BOEING'S profits fell 15 per cent in the second quarter, the last before its planned merger with McDonnell Douglas, which is the source of a major trade row across the Atlantic.
Washington Post, page 14

BRITISH Chancellor Gordon Brown received a pat on the head from the International Monetary Fund. It said that the new Labour government had made "an excellent start" in promoting stable, long-term growth.

BRITISH Telecom came under strong pressure to abandon or renegotiate its proposed $20 billion merger with US telecommunications firm MCI, following a warning from the US firm that it may face a big drop in profits. Meanwhile BT won complete independence after the UK government gave up its protective golden share.

WOOLWORTH is closing its "five-and-dime" stores across the United States, ending a century-old business. Four hundred discount stores will close and 9,200 jobs will be lost. Last year, FW Woolworth stores in the US reported an operating loss of $37 million.

MARKS & Spencer has splashed out $321 million in Britain to buy 19 of Littlewoods' largest stores.

TRAIDCRAFT, the Christian company which promotes fair trade with the Third World, reported a 6.5 per cent rise in sales of its products.

THE City of York re-entered the railway age when the Chicago-based Thrall Europa announced it is to produce 2,500 freight wagons over the next five years in the city.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates July 21	Sterling rates July 14
Australia	[illegible]	[illegible]
Austria	21.19-21.21	21.36-21.28
Belgium	62.10-62.23	62.38-62.48
Canada	[illegible]	[illegible]
Denmark	11.47-11.49	11.50-11.51
France	10.17-10.17	10.20-10.21
Germany	[illegible]	[illegible]
Hong Kong	12.99-13.00	13.07-13.08
Ireland	1.1221-1.1241	1.1177-1.1206
Italy	2,930-2,934	[illegible]
Japan	194.20-194.48	191.98-192.16
Netherlands	3.3916-3.3947	3.4023-3.4053
New Zealand	2.5612-2.5642	2.5280-2.5309
Norway	12.44-12.46	12.60-12.62
Portugal	304.45-304.70	304.83-305.18
Spain	253.82-254.01	254.60-254.70
Sweden	13.04-13.06	13.15-13.17
Switzerland	2.4761-2.4782	2.4878-2.4908
USA	1.6776-1.6783	1.6878-1.6888
ECU	1.5252-1.5268	1.5303-1.5325

FTSE100 Share index down 51.7 at 4806.7. FTSE 250 index up 40.2 at 4464.1. Gold up $0.60 at $328.25.

Europe sets new horizons

THE European Union enlargement show is finally on the road with a cast of hopefuls and a timetable of sorts. It is welcomed by those who are now eligible and is no longer opposed from within. The British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, is right to say it represents a move away from introspection even if it is not quite the new chapter in the EU which he suggests: too many pages in the previous text remain unfinished. Just why it is such a good thing is a more difficult question: the answers to it come in different and contradictory form. Is it purely an act of enlightened statesmanship? Sir Leon Brittan depicted it as such. Enlargement would be to Europe's benefit because it would bring stability in a part of the world that started two world wars. It also was a form of moral recompense to those former communist countries for whom we had "shed tears for 40 years". At last we could do something to help.

Yet enlargement is not perhaps such an unequivocal act of charity. True, it is likely to involve a dilution of the EU's collective wealth, expanding the Common Market's population from 370 million to nearly 500 million, while increasing total GDP by only 5 per cent. But the impulse might be less generous if existing members did not regard eastern Europe as a potentially lucrative market. The candidate members will have to face tough entry requirements, freeing their economies in ways that could leave them vulnerable.

The benevolence of the EU, like that of the World Trade Organisation, operates strictly on its own terms. As a Polish minister responsible for EU membership commented: "We feel like an enterprise that has received the approval of its auditors." The EU's judgmental approach is painfully clear in the dossier released by the Commission on those countries which have failed to make the grade even as potential future members. Bulgaria is reproached for reforming its economy too slowly even though it's on the way to satisfying the EU's political criteria. Slovakia by contrast is not doing at all badly on the economic front, but is ticked off for its democratic defects. Such a condescending approach is not the best way of promoting the spirit of pan-European equality.

In Britain these matters are always seen more parochially. The process is being judged much more in terms of its effect upon regional grants and the Common Agricultural Policy. The argument that CAP reform is essential to release funds for poorer would-be members of the community is a worthy one. How is it then that the new proposals appear to redistribute the burden without reducing it? The uncertainty of the British National Farmers' Union is understandable. For the consumer there is an advantage in shifting from price support to direct subsidies to farmers — but only if prices actually come down.

Self-interest cannot be shrugged aside, but Britain in particular needs to enlarge the narrow spirit with which it has approached so much of the European agenda. Last week's partial commitment to adopt a proportional representation voting system for the next Euro-elections may or may not have domestic implications. But it is right anyhow because it brings Britain more in line with its EU partners. And whatever the uncertainties, the EU offers a better route for forging a new European vision than Nato.

Cook puts down his marker

ROBIN COOK'S view of the relationship between human rights and British foreign policy was worth hearing last week. It was not quite the "vision" that it claimed to be, and its smooth presentation allowed no opportunity for direct questioning. But as several NGOs have commented, the Foreign Secretary's positive approach makes a refreshing change after years of Tory rule in which human rights groups were patronised or brushed aside. A dialogue between government, business, and NGOs is worth entering into.

The specific measures announced by Mr Cook are welcome, as far as they go. Publication of an annual report on British policy will provide a regular opportunity for appraisal. It should cast light on under-reported areas such as the UN committees. The commitment to raise the cases of prisoners of conscience in bilateral meetings with the "relevant regimes" is significant — so long as the results are logged in the annual report. Too often it has been unclear whether, or how vigorously, such representations are made: ambassadors have been known to brush aside the documentation supplied to them. A hard look at the UK Military Training Assistance Scheme is overdue. The notion that military officers from repressive regimes can be "trained" in the principles of human rights is debatable — and in some cases is laughable. To divert the money elsewhere, including finance for the media in such regimes, would provide much better value.

In broader terms, it is all very well to say that in the long term higher ethical standards are good for British business. But is anyone listening in the defence procurement industry? It is good to hear that Mr Cook's commitment on human rights is part of a government policy co-ordinated with the new Department of International Development. It would be better if the Minister of Defence had been included in the enterprise.

The strength of this new initiative will be measured by results: the review now under way of criteria for licensing weapons will be its first test, with Indonesia very high on the list. If the clues are read correctly, Mr Cook is intending to ban sales of riot control vehicles and small arms to Jakarta — but not the Hawk jets. This will be a disappointment to those who argue convincingly that the type of weapon is less important than the approval it confers on the regime concerned. There will be other tests, and perhaps other disappointments. But Mr Cook has put down a significant marker: he should not mind being held to it.

End game for Khmer Rouge

BY ANNOUNCING that Cambodian elections will be held in May next year, Prime Minister Hun Sen hopes to head off international disapproval at the virtual coup d'état which has just been carried out. He may get away with it. This is partly because the outside world has little appetite for getting involved again in Cambodian politics. It is also because in the contest that has just been bloodily won, there seems little to choose between the two sides. The royalist Funcinpec party led by the — now ousted — co-prime minister Prince Ranariddh was nourished by Western support as an anti-communist rival to Hun Sen's Cambodian People's party. But Funcinpec is now split and Ranariddh is widely judged to have given Hun Sen the pretext he needed by flirting dangerously with the Khmer Rouge.

In moving against Ranariddh, Hun Sen claimed that he and his senior military commander were illegally importing Khmer Rouge units into Phnom Penh after they suffered a new split in their bases on the Thai border. (The fate of Pol Pot himself, reported last month to be under arrest, is still unconfirmed.) The Group of Seven's special envoy to Cambodia, Yukio Imagawa, supports the view that Ranariddh provoked the fighting by "sneaking about 140 Khmer Rouge fighters into Phnom Penh". Funcinpec's negotiations with the Khmer Rouge were supposed to be secret, but the intention was clear: to establish a new coalition ahead of the elections.

Hun Sen has long since exhausted the residual credit to which he was entitled for having led the Vietnam-backed invasion that ousted the murderous Khmer Rouge 18 years ago. He insisted on a power-sharing arrangement after he was defeated in the UN-backed 1993 elections, and has since used selective terror to intimidate political opponents. One of these, former finance minister Sam Rainsy, has announced his support for Ranariddh from the safety of the Thai border. Last year Hun Sen took the credit for a previous surrender of Khmer Rouge forces from which Funcinpec had hoped to benefit. His self-aggrandising and threatening style is a further misfortune for Cambodians, who have suffered so much already from autocratic leadership — whether it be displayed by princes or political commissars.

Outside pressure on Hun Sen is needed now to seek to ensure that the elections do take place and are fair. But the UN and Cambodia's neighbours in Asean should join in insisting that the Khmer Rouge has no part in such arrangements, whoever invites them in. Their leaders belong in a war crimes court — and that is where Hun Sen, or Funcinpec, should deliver them.

Adams gets to talking with guns behind him

John Ware

GERRY ADAMS'S announcement last week that he would only approach the IRA for a second ceasefire if he was confident of a positive response must have brought a wry smile to faces in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Northern Ireland Office, whose joke is that the Sinn Fein president has only to look in the mirror to find out what the IRA is thinking.

Despite Adams's unequivocal denials, senior RUC and government sources say they are "100 per cent certain" that he retains one of the seven seats on the Provisional IRA's ruling Army Council which decided to restore the 1994 ceasefire. If that is so, while Adams has spoken in public of going the extra mile for peace, he must also have been party, however reluctantly, to conducting war in secret since the IRA ended its ceasefire 18 months ago.

His refusal to condemn IRA bombings and shootings reached its nadir in May when he said the brutal killings of two community policemen in Lurgan "diminishes us all". Where once he was feted at book-signing sessions in London and banquets in Washington, his stock sank.

But to Sinn Fein and the IRA, Adams grew hugely in stature after they went back to war. Not only did he increase Sinn Fein's vote to a record 16 per cent, making it the third largest political party in Northern Ireland, he has also delivered all the IRA's conditions for a new ceasefire.

A major cause of Sinn Fein's recent increase in popularity was the violence at Drumcree in 1996, when the RUC forced an Orange march down the Garvaghy Road by firing plastic bullets at local nationalists. There is persuasive evidence that Adams himself had helped inspire that confrontation, which confirmed his long-held claim that Northern Ireland is an unreformable Orange state where the rule of law operates on the principle that might is right.

Six months after the first ceasefire, Adams urged Republican activists to direct their energies to a new front; the "sound of angry voices and marching feet". In response, residents' coalitions were established in nationalist areas through which Orangemen marched. Before then, Orange marches were tolerated by a peaceful but resentful Catholic population. But portraying nationalists as victims of British-backed loyalist supremacy is essential to keep the Sinn Fein band-wagon rolling.

This year, residents' coalitions everywhere apart from Drumcree faced down Orangemen, forcing them to cancel or re-route marches. By avoiding confrontation, Unionism then occupied the high ground. Adams wrested it back by announcing another IRA ceasefire was imminent. British officials have long respected Adams for his tactical brilliance.

The Ulster Unionist party leader David Trimble threatened to pull out of inter-party peace talks, claiming the Government had shifted its ground on de-commissioning. Trimble wanted guns handed over before and during substantive peace talks. The Government required the IRA only to consider handing them over during talks. If Trimble was against the de-commissioning proposals, he, not Adams, will be called the saboteur of peace.

Adams's hardline stand on de-commissioning was the last of four conditions for a new ceasefire to be agreed by the Government. Sinn Fein also demanded admission to peace talks afterwards, a deadline for talks, and confidence-building measures. Tony Blair agreed Sinn Fein's entry to talks only six weeks after a ceasefire, set a deadline of next May for talks to be completed, and promised to repatriate 10 IRA prisoners to the Irish Republic.

Adams had faced down John Major. After the ceasefire, the Government said Sinn Fein would not be admitted to talks until the IRA changed its pledge of a cessation of violence to "permanent". Three months later, Major had made the working assumption that the ceasefire was permanent.

Getting to the peace conference table on the IRA's terms has been one of Adams's goals since he devised the Long War strategy in the 1970s. By broadening the IRA's appeal into politics with the Armalite and the ballot box, Sinn Fein became so popular it threatened constitutional nationalism in the Social Democratic Labour Party.

This led to the 1985 Anglo-Irish agreement, which ensured a consultative role for Dublin in the running of Northern Ireland, while guaranteeing Unionists that it would remain part of the UK. Publicly Adams attacked the treaty as a sell-out. Privately he hailed it as the most important development since partition in 1921.

ADAMS persuaded the IRA that the struggle needed to be broadened further with a 1994 ceasefire backed by a pan-nationalist alliance of the SDLP, Dublin and Washington. When the IRA laid down its arms so far short of the goal of a united Ireland, an ex-British Army general saluted Adams for his courage, as did the former Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke. They had in mind the fate of IRA commander Michael Collins, who in 1922 settled for partition and was assassinated. What no one realised was that Adams must have also agreed to follow the IRA back to war if that's what it wanted.

What appears to be the real strategy was set out in a document circulated before the ceasefire, called Tactical Use Of Armed Struggle. It suggests the IRA's first ceasefire was merely a tactic to get to the conference table, and that the IRA will retain the option of a return to violence in the event of major blocks in the peace talks; presumably why it has deliberately not prefixed the new ceasefire announcement with the word "permanent".

Having got the IRA to the negotiating table with its armoury intact, Adams's position as overall head of the Republican movement now seems unassailable. There will be no split as long as he leads it. The IRA must be confident that its supreme commander will continue to advance steadily on all fronts however long it takes.

John Ware is a reporter with BBC's Panorama programme

The Washington Post

Congress Rounds on Annan's Reforms

John M. Goshko
at the United Nations

THE Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed last week what he called "the most extensive and far-reaching reforms" in the 52-year history of the United Nations. But the long-awaited proposals included neither staff nor budget cuts, and Republican critics immediately said they fell far short of what Congress expects if it is to pay the $1 billion U.S. debt threatening the world body with financial collapse.

"It's frankly very underwhelming. If this is the whole blueprint, it's going to be very hard for Congress to accept as a viable reform and a basis for paying the U.S. arrears," said Sen. Rod Grams, R-Minnesota, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee that oversees U.S. participation in the United Nations.

The "quiet revolution," as Annan dubbed his plan, relies primarily on merging U.N. departments and other seemingly unremarkable steps. Annan said the package should be judged on its totality rather than individual parts, and he insisted it would lead to greater efficiency, reduced costs and fundamental changes in the way the United Nations does business.

But the consolidations are to be accomplished without cutting personnel from the 9,000-member secretariat, beyond 1,000 vacant positions that Annan earlier had promised to wipe from the books. The plan fails to eliminate any existing U.N. programs and proposes adding new ones. And, rhetorically at least, it tilts heavily toward the idea of an activist U.N. economic development role, which is supported strongly by Third World countries but opposed by American conservatives as a wasteful drain on the organization's resources.

These facts pose potentially serious problems for the Clinton administration, which engineered Annan's election to the secretary general's post and hopes Congress will forestall eroding U.S. influence in the world body by paying $819 million of the U.N. arrears. But Congress has conditioned the payment on a presidential certification that the United Nations has met specific conditions Congress has set.

In defending his proposals last week, Annan objected to efforts to "keep pulling me back to Congress and Washington." He insisted his reform plan was a report to all 185 member states and not one country, no matter how much the organization depends on that country's financial and political support. Using a phrase that has gained currency here in recent days, Annan's chief aides have said the aim was not to engage in a "slash-and-burn exercise," but to find ways in which he believes the United Nations can be more effective for all its members.

A cautious endorsement of Annan's plan came from Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, who said she needed more time to review. But, she added, the administration "heartily endorses [Annan's] focus on improving management and efficiencies, cutting costs and emphasizing the U.N.'s core mission."

That view was not shared by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms, R-North Carolina, principal architect of the benchmarks. Marc Thiessen, Helms's spokesman, said "the disappointing nature of the reform plan shows that the forces of entrenched U.N. bureaucracy and pressure from Third World members are stronger than the secretary general."

The cooperation of the Third World countries, who form a majority of the 185 U.N. members, along with that of the roughly 53,000 international civil servants who work for the various U.N. agencies around the world, is vital to U.N. reform

Simultaneous with the announcement of Annan's proposals, the Group of 77, the principal umbrella organization of developing states, released a statement of principles saying that development "must be restored to the top of the United Nations' agenda," and warning, "The reform process . . . should not be motivated by the aim of downsizing the United Nations and achieving savings."

Also wary of the reform process are U.N. employees, whose morale has been eroded by an unceasing barrage of congressional and media criticism about alleged waste and inefficiency.

Most important, U.N. officials say, the bureaucracy has been made a scapegoat for recent U.N. failures in Somalia, Bosnia, Congo and Cambodia that were the fault not of U.N. workers but of the unwillingness of the international community to confront the problems head-on.

The principal reforms proposed by Annan include:

- Creation of a deputy undersecretary post, preferably to be filled by a woman.
- Merging 12 departments into five and establishing a cabinet-style system centered on five principal areas: peace and security, development, economic and social issues, humanitarian affairs, and human rights.
- Coordinating six agencies dealing with development issues into two groups, one dealing with development, one with humanitarian aid.
- Using any savings generated by staff cuts to create an economic development fund.
- Consolidating human rights activities under the high commissioner for human rights in Geneva and drug trafficking and terrorism programs under a single administration in Vienna.
- Creating a department to deal with disarmament and weapons proliferation.

War Crimes Prosecutors 'Lack Funds'

Charles Trueheart
at The Hague

WAR CRIMES prosecutors reaping new international support after the recent arrests of two suspects in the former Yugoslavia say their work is being threatened at a critical stage by shortages of staff and funds from the United Nations.

The four-year-old International Criminal Tribunal, which is investigating atrocities in the recent wars in Bosnia and Croatia and trying those indicted for war crimes, has been operating for months without 120 additional staff positions it says it needs to keep up with the quickening flow of captured suspects.

"That's regarded by the secretariat [the office of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan] as a huge increase," said Graham Blewitt, the deputy war crimes prosecutor here. "But this is a brand new organization that is just beginning its work."

He said the United Nations, which created, oversees and funds the tribunal, may allot the tribunal only eight new employees.

Blewitt and other court officials also complain that they have been denied the use of skilled personnel whose services a few supportive countries wish to donate at no cost to the United Nations.

In the first phase of the tribunal's mission, the bulk of the work was investigatory. But the first indictees are coming to trial, and new ones are being arrested. To conduct trials and prepare for new ones not publicly anticipated until a few weeks ago, the tribunal's staff has had to give short shrift to current investigations.

There are 77 public indictments outstanding, and an undisclosed number of additional sealed indictments. Only 10 wanted men are in custody in The Hague, but the tribunal's pace already is threatening to overwhelm its resources — a 1997 budget just under $50 million — and staff of 356.

Recent weeks have given the tribunal a new lease on life, notably this month's dramatic arrest of Milan Kovasevic, a hospital director in Prijedor, Bosnia. A synchronized attempt to arrest the former Prijedor police chief, Simo Drljaca, ended in the suspect's death after he reportedly opened fire on his British captors.

That operation stiffened the impression of resolve established a few days earlier with the surprise arrest in Croatia of another suspected war criminal, former Vukovar mayor Slavko Dokmanovic.

The tribunal's problems, which include a lack of courtroom space that forces simultaneous trials to alternate their sessions, have been exacerbated by a political conflict over the use of contributed personnel. These lawyers, investigators and others are dispatched to The Hague from countries whose governments pay their salaries. But now, even with the United Nations hard up for funds, they are being turned away.

The United States, the main contributor of "gratis" employees here, is locked in a dispute with the United Nations over their use. U.N. rules require that providers of gratis employees pay a 13 percent overhead charge to the United Nations to cover institutional expenses involved in putting their people on the payroll.

The United States refuses; several other countries with people seconded to the tribunal have paid the U.N. surcharge, in some cases under protest. The tribunal staff is now limited to 22 gratis employees.

War criminal . . . Dusan Tadic sentenced to 20 years' jail last week for atrocities in former Yugoslavia

Disrespect Shown to World Body

EDITORIAL

IF THE purpose of reform at the United Nations were merely to make the world body a more efficient conveyor of the diplomatic, peacekeeping, developmental and other services it provides its 185 members, then the argument would have been wrapped up years ago. In budget and management, the United Nations has been worked over before, and the changes now recommended by the secretary general, Kofi Annan, take the organization further along, though they do not meet all the "benchmarks" set unilaterally by the U.S. Congress.

But of course efficiency is not what the argument has been all about. The real issue goes to the symbolic role that the United States plays in the world. The United States is the single superpower, the most modern as well as the most powerful country, the one more than any other with deep interests in what goes on practically everywhere in the world.

Should it therefore dictate to other members, define their common agenda, insist on prevailing? Or should it use the United Nations as a forum in which to cooperate as much as possible on shared interests, in which case a more conciliatory mode of engagement is required?

To put a point on it, is the United Nations to reflect the world view of Sen. Jesse Helms, who has said he believes the organization represents a conspiracy to diminish American sovereignty? Or is it to represent the mainstream view of the organization as a place where important American interests, though scarcely all of them, can be usefully defended and advanced by working with the other members?

No doubt the table of organization proposed by Annan could be further revised. No doubt some additional jobs could be closed down without serious harm to the organization. It is fair to put the United Nations' internal procedures to additional tests, even painful ones. But it is not fair — it is disrespectful — for the U.S. Congress simply to demand that the U.N. secretary general impose changes, such as reducing the American share of the budget or crediting the United States for money it has spent on its own to support peacekeeping. These changes require the formal amendment of separate treaties.

This whole business of U.N. reform has gone on for a very long time and with a heavy impact on the organization's functioning. Annan's proposals may not be the last word, but they provide a reasonable basis for early American resumption of a full role in serving its interests and accepting its obligations at the United Nations.

Bickering Republicans Blame Gingrich

Dan Balz and Cecl Connolly in Cleveland





THE INFIGHTING over the leadership of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Georgia, that rocked House Republicans last week reflects far deeper problems than a debate over who will lead the House.

Republican activists and key strategists interviewed over the past week say the absence of leadership nationally and lack of consensus on a new party agenda invite intensified intraparty conflict that will leave Republicans weakened in upcoming battles with President Clinton and the Democrats.

"We don't have unifying themes and we don't have unifying leadership," said Steve Merksamer, who was chief of staff to former California governor George Deukmejian. "We have control of both houses [of Congress] and the country sympathetic to our agenda . . . and what are we doing with it? We're squandering it."

The uproar over Gingrich's weakened leadership, which led to the hasty resignation of Rep. Bill Paxon, R-New York, as a key member of the speaker's team in the House, helped crystallize a growing sense of frustration within the party. As one top party strategist put it last week, "The tragedy is that we're on the verge of passing a balanced budget and cutting taxes and we're in a circle shooting each other."

In one sense, the frustration grows out of the party's collective failure to compete against a popular president who they believe has stolen their best issues and thrown them back in their faces.

The party's problems also reflect a loss of confidence in their own agenda. Support for the potency of supply-side economics has frayed in the face of the strong economy, and with Clinton and the Republicans nearing agreement on a balanced budget with tax cuts, there is no consensus about how to shape a new agenda.

These problems are responsible not only for the complaints about Gingrich's leadership that brought about the abortive coup attempt but also for an escalation in long-standing tensions between economic and social conservatives and northern and southern Republicans.

Many conservatives complain that the party is losing its identity as a result of Clinton's shift to the center and what they say is their leadership's collective lack of courage in developing a clear conservative alternative to the president's policies. Moderates complain that conservatives care more about ideological purity than governing. With no one exerting strong leadership, the fragmentation of the party has increased.

"We are like the Democrats of the '60s and '70s," said one midwestern Republican. "Remember when Republicans used to laugh at Democrats beating themselves up? Now we're doing the same thing."

Gingrich's problems drew the headlines, but there were other signs of unrest last week. In Boston, Massachusetts Gov. William F. Weld lashed out at Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms, R-North Carolina, accusing Helms of "ideological extortion" in holding up his proposed nomination to be Clinton's ambassador to Mexico.

Weld and Helms disagree on social issues, such as abortion and gay rights, and Helms has accused Weld of being soft on the war against drugs. Weld's attack on Helms threatens to strain relations between the party's moderate and conservative wings.

Republicans haven't fully recovered from the public relations debacle of the fight over disaster relief, in which the president vetoed a disaster-aid bill and charged that the Republicans had loaded it up with extraneous issues. Eventually the Republicans caved to Clinton's pressure. Now they fear Clinton is on the brink of stealing the tax issue from them as they settle the final terms of balancing the budget.

Cutting taxes once was the Republicans' most powerful political weapon; today, by a slight margin, Americans say they trust the Democrats over the Republicans to hold down taxes, according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll.

These frustrations prompted members of the Republican National Committee to urge RNC chairman Jim Nicholson to convene a party summit to bring the bickering to an end and produce a new agenda that the party can push once the budget and tax fights are settled. But many Republicans fear the unrest will continue well into the presidential campaign in 2000.

Party leaders and activists offered a variety of explanations for the problems, including the difficulty of trying to be a governing party from Capitol Hill.

"We are clearly suffering from the transition of having been a presidential party to one that is more diverse, with power that is more diffuse," said Tom Rath, the national committeeman from New Hampshire.

Another Republican was more blunt: "If we had a strong leader in either House to rally around, we wouldn't have this problem," he said.

U.S., Europe Clash over Boeing Deal

Steven Pearlstein and Anne Swardson

THE Clinton administration is considering how to retaliate against Europe if it makes good on its threat to try to undermine the merger of U.S. aerospace giants Boeing Co. and McDonnell Douglas Corp.

The looming trans-Atlantic dispute was the subject of a White House meeting last week attended by the secretaries of commerce and transportation, the U.S. trade representative, officials of the Pentagon and State Department, and the president's two top economic advisers.

The officials considered a number of possible actions against the Europeans. These include limiting flights between the United States and France, imposing tariffs on European airplanes and filing an official protest with the World Trade Organization.

While no decisions were made the officials agreed to put the full weight of the government behind Boeing now that it has received approval for the $15 billion merger from the Federal Trade Commission.

Administration spokesman Michael McCurry told reporters at the White House last week that consultations with the European Union are "ongoing" and the president remains "hopeful" that outstanding issues can be resolved. The Europeans, however, are showing no inclination toward compromise.

In Brussels last week, antitrust regulators from all 15 European Union member countries reaffirmed opposition to the merger, arguing that it would leave Boeing with two-thirds of the global market for commercial airplanes and threaten the survival of its only other rival, Airbus Industrie, the European consortium. Although the European Commission has no authority to block a combination of two U.S. firms, under European law it could impose a fine on Boeing of more than $4 billion.

Top officials of the Justice Department and the Pentagon flew to Brussels in an attempt to allay European concerns and emphasize that the administration would not tolerate undue interference in the operations of an industry crucial to the economic and military strength of the United States.

The Europeans are also upset by the subsidies they claim Boeing and McDonnell Douglas are receiving from the Pentagon and NASA in the form of research and development contracts to develop new lightweight materials for use in airplanes. Boeing and U.S. officials argue that since the materials are not yet being used to make commercial jets, the research funding does not violate a 1992 treaty with the Europeans limiting government subsidies to aircraft makers.

"To our minds that is patently ridiculous," said Ian Massey, Airbus's financial controller.

Boeing has offered to report annually to the EU on the details of its unclassified R&D contracts from the government. But the Europeans are insisting the U.S. government agree to reopen the 1992 treaty — a step U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshevsky has said she will not consider in the context of the Boeing deal.

China Challenging U.S. Power in Pacific

OPINION

Jim Hoagland

WHILE Senate Republicans labor to implicate the Clinton White House and the Chinese government in campaign finance scandal, another and ultimately more important investigation of Chinese intentions toward America is under way in Washington.

The other inquiry, taking place quietly at the Pentagon and elsewhere in the foreign policy establishment, involves signs of a developing opposition in Beijing to America's long-term military presence in Asia. A quarter-century of Chinese ambivalence about the stationing of U.S. warships, aircraft and troops in the Pacific appears to be hardening into a suspicion and ultimate Chinese rejection of the balance of power in the region.

Both investigations demonstrate that China is on the mind of official Washington as no country has been since the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War.

Beijing inspires greed, fear and hope on a grand scale in the American mind, where dreams of great wealth compete with fears that Fu Manchu runs the Politburo in Beijing.

The Senate probe has established that there is substantial evidence that senior Chinese officials did plan to divert some of their lobbying effort and money directly into U.S. political campaigns in ways that probably violated U.S. law.

How much and to what purpose is likely never to be clear.

The Chinese government and the Clinton administration share a common interest in hoping that the campaign finance scandal will blow over. An ambiguous outcome to the scandal investigations would permit the mid-autumn Washington summit President Clinton has scheduled with Chinese leader Jiang Zemin to stay on track.

Harder for the two leaders to sweep aside are the emerging signs that China no longer sees a long-term large American military presence in the Pacific as stabilizing. Having pocketed Hong Kong, China has turned to the reabsorption of Taiwan as its next big project.

On this subject, U.S. and Chinese interests diverge and could produce armed conflict. In this scenario, U.S. forces in the region become a serious impediment for China's single most important ambition at the beginning of the next century.

Since the Nixon administration adopted Beijing as a strategic ally against Moscow in 1972, China has been studiously ambiguous about America's military facilities in Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia. Official Chinese comments about foreign bases as the outmoded legacy of colonialism have traditionally been balanced by informal but authoritative praise for the American role as "the cork in the bottle" of Japanese militarism.

A Chinese academician explains Beijing's view this way: If China were asked to pay the cost of U.S. bases in Japan as a way of keeping Japan from pursuing nuclear weapons and a strong military, it would be in China's interest to pay the cost.

Beijing has also seemed to welcome quietly the U.S. presence in South Korea as preventing war on China's border. At the same time, Beijing openly opposes any U.S. military presence that inhibits its freedom of action in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea.

This once delicate balance has shifted as disagreement over Taiwan has mounted, with Beijing reacting in fury to moves by the Bush and Clinton administrations to support Taiwan militarily. The recent American effort to get Japan to take on more military responsibility for the region as part of the U.S.-Japan bilateral security pact has also stirred Chinese resentment and suspicion.

"Asian security should be decided by Asians," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang in April. His comment took U.S. military analysts aback and was cited last month by the Far East Economic Review as part of a developing Chinese diplomatic campaign against the U.S.-Japanese partnership in the Pacific.

China now advocates replacing bilateral security arrangements with free-floating multilateral regional organizations, much as the Soviet Union once proposed that NATO be dismantled and a Common European Home established.

These moves suggest that President Clinton will be pushed hard in the autumn summit to weaken U.S. defense commitments to Taiwan and Japan as the price for a strategic partnership with Beijing and access to the El Dorado riches that U.S. companies seek there.

Only one answer from Clinton can be acceptable in that case: No deal.

Fashion Mourns a Titan's Passing

Robin Givhan on the legacy of the murdered designer Gianni Versace

DESIGNER Gianni Versace is being mourned by the fashion industry as a fallen titan. Before Versace, there were no supermodels, no celebrities at shows and in advertising, no screaming fans. Fashion was not entertainment, it was merely clothes.

Versace was 30 years-old when he launched his signature collection in 1978. It was an almost immediate success. Over time, his work was celebrated not only in fashion annals for its brashness, but also in museums because of the ways it reflected the culture and re-energized the Old World artistry of the "petite mains," or seamstress of the couture.

He headed a family-run company that includes men's and women's wear, fragrances, accessories, housewares, books and a planned cosmetics line. The company had worldwide sales estimated at $550 million for 1996.

Versace learned about the fashion business from his mother while growing up in Reggio di Calabria, in the south of Italy. She was a dressmaker and ran a boutique. His father was an appliance salesman.

In 1972 Versace moved to Milan, where he joined a creative cadre of freelance designers. That was the way things worked then. Designers were journeymen of a sort, working for whatever fashion house was in need of their services. Versace worked for labels like Callaghan, Complice and Genny.

Those who were part of the industry then remember that he made a strong impact in Milan with those early collections. Observers knew that Versace was someone to watch. When he started his own line, without substantial outside backing, he surrounded himself with his family. His older brother, Santo, was the financial wizard. His sister, Donatella, was his muse, his sounding board, the fire starter and later, within the entertainment industry, a rainmaker.

Versace broke away from a relatively small pack of upstarts in Milan. He was helped along by Italian textile mills, which tend to function in collaboration with Italian designers to create a national fashion industry. Versace also was helped along by the French. As he was just getting started, retailers were becoming disenchanted with Paris. The French were said to be notoriously difficult to work with.

"The Italians were gift-givers and lunch-takers," says Mary Lou Luther, a longtime fashion writer who has covered the industry for more than 30 years. "Italians, through their generosity of spirit and business sense, outsmarted the French."

Back then, the field of designers wasn't so crowded. Today, anyone with a dream and bolt of fabric thinks it's possible to launch a collection.

Versace was one of the last to stake a claim before the industry exploded. And, thanks to an early advantageous apprenticeship, he had financial smarts — the Achilles' heel of many designers.

He had the good fortune of having worked with business-savvy Donatella Girombelli, owner of the Italian manufacturing powerhouse that includes Genny and Complice. And he had his brother Santo, who at an early age had worked in their father's bookkeeping office.

Once Luther asked Versace why he never wore ties even though he made them for his menswear line. "I remember he said, 'I make ties because my brother needs them to sell'."

For those who only have a passing interest in fashion — a glimpse of a runway show on television, a quick flip through a magazine — it might seem that Versace designed only the most extreme garments, things that only a rock star or movie star would dare wear. And indeed his first collections, the ones that so impressed the media, were hard-edged, audacious, even rough.

In a way, they were "bad designs," says Kal Ruttenstein, fashion director of Bloomingdale's. "He did strong, unsubtle shoulders on leather jackets . . . But Gianni developed and grew as a designer the more he associated with people like [Vogue editor] Anna Wintour and his sister, who's such a blonde bombshell. He took people like her into consideration in his designs."

The hard edges, the bondage-inspired collections, though, got him press. It lured the actors and the rock stars. They in turn created the magnetic pull that attracted other customers: wealthy socialites, Young Turks and regular folks who loved flashy clothes and had the money to spend on them.

"He brought a wonderful sense of showmanship to clothes," says longtime friend Polly Allen Mellen, creative director of Allure. "Then he hit a younger crowd, and they hungered for his clothes."

Versace understood the importance of marketing. He loved celebrities and knew that they not only attracted the attention of the press, but they also helped to set trends. In 1992, he designed the stage costumes for Elton John's world tour. He surrounded himself with superstars from Madonna to Sylvester Stallone. He knew their images were global.

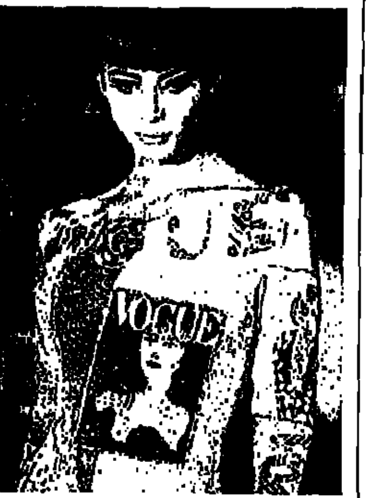
And Versace was looking to create strongholds not just in Europe and the United States, but also in Japan, the Middle East and South America. "As far as we could see, they were very organized, very driven by growth, and growth in new categories," says Neva Hall, who for five years headed up Neiman Marcus's couture and designer sportswear division. "They were marketing-savvy."

Versace had an unmistakable style. And that's what every designer needs to succeed. Whether its the subtle slouch of Giorgio Armani, the interlocking C's and quilted purses of Chanel or the Yankee tweeds of Ralph Lauren, customers buy designer clothing because of what it conveys to those around them.

Says Hall: "You'd know a Versace dress a block away."

From the very beginning, that had been the point.

Versace: Unmistakable style with celebrity appeal


Versace dresses from 1991 . . .


. . . 1993 . . .


. . . and Liz Hurley

Canadian Physician Faces Murder Charge

Howard Schneider in Halifax, Nova Scotia

BY EARLY November, Paul Mills had undergone 10 operations over six months associated with his throat cancer and was, according to officials at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Center, in "tremendous discomfort." Life support had been withdrawn at the request of his family. He was wracked with infection and within hours of death.

It was then that intensive care physician, Nancy Morrison, took a step that her supporters contend was well within a doctor's province given the patient's condition, but that others say went too far. She administered a dose of potassium chloride, a drug that can be therapeutic under certain conditions, but that, in sufficient quantity, stops the heart so efficiently that it is authorized as a lethal injection drug for executions in some American prisons.

Mills died, and Morrison was charged with first-degree murder, in a case that might prompt Canada to address medical, legal and ethical issues it has so far skirted. Unlike the United States, where the suicides assisted by the physician, Jack Kevorkian, and other cases, are leading state governments to set rules for how and when the life of terminally ill patients can be ended, Canada is only beginning to confront those questions.

Canadian federal law prohibits assisting in a suicide, and conviction carries criminal penalties of up to 14 years. But when it comes to managing the end of life, Morrison's lawyer and others say Canadian doctors practice in a gray area where some drugs, including morphine, are considered acceptable palliatives, even in doses that arguably accelerate the moment of death, while others, like potassium chloride, are taboo because they accelerate it too much.

"Euthanasia and mercy killing are not terms known in Canadian law," prosecutor Craig Botterill told Maclean's magazine. "This is a first-degree murder charge, and I'm arguing that she killed him."

Twice in Ontario, health care professionals have been charged with murder for using potassium chloride on terminally ill patients, but in both cases prosecutors reduced the charge to the less serious "administering a noxious substance."

Morrison's lawyer, Joel Pink, said no such deals are being offered in her case, and even if they were, Morrison feels she did nothing wrong.

The case likely will not go to trial until next year. In the meantime, the 42-year-old physician resigned her intensive care post at the Victoria General unit of the health sciences center, the largest medical complex in eastern Canada. She is still practicing medicine and remains on the staff of Dalhousie University's medical school.

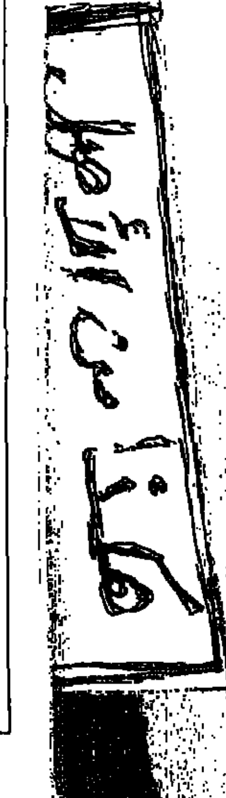
Mills was recorded as having died of natural causes related to his infections, and no autopsy was performed. Pink said it might be difficult for prosecutors to convince a jury the injection of potassium chloride is what ended the life of a man whose system was already shutting down, let alone prove his death amounts to a planned killing.

Working against Morrison, however, is the fact that she did not consult the family. Mills's widow, Dorice Lastowski, said in a telephone interview that the family had agreed to end life support, but that she would never have sanctioned a life-ending injection. "I am still shocked by it," Lastowski said. "We took it for granted that they would take him off the life support and let nature take its course, but that did not happen.

"I know he was a very sick man," she said, but "if God was ready to come and get him, He would have come and got him . . . Even if it had been a mercy killing, you have no right to take somebody's life."

An internal review was commissioned, and Morrison was suspended for three months from practicing in intensive care. One colleague, dissatisfied with that punishment, triggered the murder investigation by notifying police.

"There is a line between acceptable medical practice and unacceptable medical practice, but the line is gray and it is a foot wide," said Peter Spurway, public affairs director for the hospital center. "It has been ignored because it is politically difficult."



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Portrait Of a Nation

Michael Gorra

SNAKES AND LADDERS
Glimpses of Modern India
By Gita Mehta
Doubleday. 297pp. $22.95

AT A DINNER party this spring I sat between two novelists from South Asia and listened to them talk about contemporary Indian politics. Was there any chance that the former prime minister, Narasimha Rao, might go to jail on corruption charges? How about the relation between the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party and the thugs of Bombay's Shiv Sena? Did the Congress Party really think it could bring down the government? The conversation was racily full of India's lifeblood of gossip, and I found to my surprise that I could follow it all. But then I had just finished reading Gita Mehta's Snakes And Ladders.

Published to celebrate the 50th anniversary of India's independence from Britain, Snakes And Ladders takes its title from a board game in which a roll of the dice determines "how many squares a player may move." Landing at the foot of a ladder lets you climb it, "sometimes moving thirty squares in a single throw." But landing on a snake means you have to slide back down "while your gleeful opponents [streak] past."

For Mehta the game provides an apt metaphor for postcolonial India, a country that sometimes seems to have "vaulted over the painful stages experienced by other countries, lifted by ladders we had no right to expect." But at other moments, she adds, "we have been swallowed by the snakes of past nightmares, finding ourselves . . . back at square one."

Mehta's "glimpses of modern India" stand as an attempt to "explain" the country to herself, an explanation that provides a user-friendly guide to the many snakes who have stuck their fangs into contemporary Indian politics. She begins with an account of her parents' involvement in the Independence movement that echoes Wordsworth — "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." But Mehta then shows how the promised land of independence has been weakened by the dominance of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Her analysis seems fair enough; nevertheless it will be familiar to anyone who's read much about the country.

What's fresh about it is the deftness with which she weaves personal anecdote into political chronicle. So she describes attending a rally against Indira Gandhi's experiment in totalitarian rule, the "Emergency" of 1975-77, a rally held in Delhi's enormous Friday Mosque. The government cut off the electricity, and the resulting "darkness . . . added a somberness to the occasion . . . allowing us to see the great mosque as it must have been seen by" the Moghul emperors who built it, "its massive lines . . . undiminished by . . . neon." And as for Mrs. Gandhi's claim that Indira was India and India Indira — well, I admire the drop-dead insouciance with which Mehta describes being "bored to tears" by such "overbearing leaders."



Gita Mehta explains her view of post-colonial India, weaving the personal anecdote into the political chronicle PHOTO: JOHN COLE/IMPACT

India's ladders are more tentatively described. On one level they have to do with such things as the existence of a free press, and the continued functioning, despite massive corruption, of Indian democracy; with the fact as well that the country has become self-sufficient in food. But Mehta is also fascinated by the resilience of her fellow citizens, the ingenuity with which they manage to scrape up a living in the most difficult circumstances; in one of the book's most memorable chapters, she functions as a subcontinental Studs Terkel, interviewing ragpickers at work in Delhi's garbage dumps. And Mehta remains exhilarated by the astonishing scale of India, which beggars that of Western Europe — a country whose "lack of homogeneity" means that "most Indians view most other Indians as foreigners." To Mehta that heterogeneity is a strength, a point that she makes by contrasting India with Japan. For when Japan, that once-closed nation, let in the West, the kimono virtually vanished. India, she writes, has never tried to banish the foreign; and the sari remains.

Mehta is fascinated by the resilience and ingenuity of her fellow citizens

Mehta's strongest chapters are not, however, the ones in which she makes such large cultural claims. Instead she's at her best when her subjects seem at their most modest and most personal. I enjoyed the wicked eye with which she describes the visit to India of an American corporate group called the "Young Presidents' Organization," a description that recalls her 1980 Karma Cola, a sharply satiric account of the marketing of Indian spirituality in the West.

She offers an enchanting essay on her own childhood reading, on "lending libraries . . . that fit into garishly painted tin trunks, small enough to be strapped onto the backs of bicycles." And I think I'll always remember a piece about a filmmaker who raised the money for his movies literally at the grassroots level. He hired a van and a projector, and travelled from village to village, showing classics in the rice fields; Battleship Potemkin was the villagers' great favorite.

Parts of Snakes And Ladders betray their origins as magazine articles, pieces not only for Britain's Sunday Times but for Vogue and House And Garden as well. The book seems to have a disjointed structure, its chapters loosely stitched together in a way that makes it neither a unified whole nor a collection of fully individual essays. But Gita Mehta's voice is marked by warmth and charm, and this volume serves as a fine reminder as to why India remains, in the words that she lovingly quotes from Mark Twain, "the one land all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined."

The Director's Cut

Joel E. Siegel

STEVEN SPIELBERG
The Unauthorized Biography
By John Baxter
HarperCollins. 457pp. $25

STEVEN SPIELBERG
A Biography
By Joseph McBride
Simon & Schuster. 528pp. $30

THE MASTERING object of Steven Spielberg's life, like that of his movies, is success at the expense of substance. One would expect the saga of the world's richest, most celebrated filmmaker to be packed with challenges and conflicts, the biographical equivalent of his roller-coaster productions. What's surprising, even shocking, about these two hefty tomes is the banality of Spielberg's story, as mundane as the suburbia that spawned him and that he celebrates in his work.

Anticipating a future autobiography, Spielberg and his key associates refused to meet with his present chroniclers — American film historian Joseph McBride and Australian-born critic-novelist-broadcaster John Baxter. Consequently, these unauthorized biographers were forced to draw heavily on the same pool of previously published interviews, which results in considerable anecdotal overlap.

A tireless researcher, McBride spent three years tracking down more than 300 of Spielberg's teachers, neighbors, colleagues and friends, his zealousness reflected by 50 pages of source documentation and dozens of footnotes. The result is probably more information than anyone cares to know about the filmmaker's early years; it takes McBride 132 type-dense pages to reach his subject's high school graduation. In terms of sheer data, McBride far outclasses his competitor.

Drawing on only a dozen or so fresh interviews and sprinkled with careless errors (Albert Brooks did not direct Broadcast News; the tag line of Spielberg's suburban sci-fi smash is "E.T., call home" not "E.T., phone home,"), Baxter's book is largely a cut-and-paste job based on secondary sources. But the author's geographical and skeptical distance from his subject affords him a perspective McBride lacks. A smoother stylist, Baxter keeps his account moving, pointedly probes some disquieting episodes in his subject's professional and personal history, and provides a useful artistic and commercial context in which to view the filmmaker's ascent. Each biography has admirable qualities, notably McBride's doggedness and Baxter's detachment, but either will suffice. Plowing through two accounts of this less-than-gripping life can be recommended only to Spielberg obsessives.

In interviews, Spielberg whiningly depicts his childhood as a movable trauma. Dragged by his peripatetic, indulgent, ill-mated parents — Arnold, an innovative electrical engineer, and Leah, a frustrated suburban bohemian — from Ohio to New Jersey to Arizona to Northern California, he was academically and athletically inept and, he alleges, tormented continuously by youthful anti-Semites. (Many of McBride's informants question the existence of these persecutors.) Escaping into pop culture fantasies Spielberg discovered his metier. By his early teens, he was programming and promoting 16-mm film screenings and making his own movies. At 1[7] he wrote and directed his first feature, Firelight, the incunabulum of his most satisfying effort, Close Encounters Of The Third Kind.

After high school, Spielberg insinuated himself through the gates of Universal Studios and, within few years, helmed episodes of Night Gallery, Columbo and other television series and the tense, technically accomplished made-for-TV movie Duel. With 1974's The Sugarland Express, he graduated to theatrical features, creating a string of box-office sensations (Jaws, Close Encounters, the Indiana Jones trilogy, E.T.) punctuated by misbegotten flops (1941, Always, Hook). By the mid-80s, having directed eight features, produced an equal number of movies by other filmmakers and amassed a fortune, he began craving critical approval and vainly addressed uncharacteristically mature themes — the plight of southern blacks (The Color Purple), children in wartime (Empire Of The Sun) — before achieving this goal with 1993's Academy Award-winning Holocaust drama, Schindler's List. Who else but Spielberg could have been sufficiently cunning to snag his long-awaited Best Picture Oscar by devising what critic J. Hoberman called "a feel-good entertainment about the ultimate feel-bad experience of the twentieth century?"

Spielberg regards himself, as he does his protagonists, as "Mr. Everyday Regular Fella," and his consensus artistic tastes — he collects Norman Rockwell paintings and Disney animation cels — tend to reinforce this image. Yet, hints of a darker side emerge in both biographies. His sadistic treatment of his three sisters, greedy reluctance to share critical kudos and financial rewards with colleagues, and eagerness to distance himself from troubled associates (notably, director John Landis during the investigation of the Spielberg-produced Twilight Zone mishap, which claimed the lives of three people) suggest that he's considerably more complicated than an emotionally stunted Peter Pan who compensates for a dismal childhood by concocting lost-boy screen fantasies.

There are hints that Spielberg is more complicated than a stunted Peter Pan

What both books fail to confront is how drastically Spielberg's success has affected American film culture. His strategy of enticing huge international audiences by inflating simplistic, formulaic pop material into blockbuster events movies then selling off merchandising licenses for additional profit, has inflamed the rapaciousness of Tinseltown bean counters. In 1975 — the year Jaws became the most profitable movie ever made — Hollywood produced One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, Nashville, Barry Lyndon, Dog Day Afternoon, Shampoo, and The Man Who Would Be King, adult projects that would stand scant chance of being green-lighted in the post-Spielberg era. The next time you scan the movie listings only to find the neighborhood multiplex stuffed with footling Spielberg-ers you're witnessing his legacy.

Poor demand share of Argentina's wealth

Christine Legrand
in Buenos Aires

"THEY can go on 1,000 marches and organise 1,000 strikes, but it won't change anything," Argentina's President Carlos Menem said after 30,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Buenos Aires on July 11.

The demonstration was backed by opposition parties and the bishops of La Quiaca, 1,800km north west of the capital, and of Zarate-Campana in Buenos Aires province, two regions that have been hard hit by unemployment and poverty.

The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the Movement of Fighting Farmers' Wives, retired people, teachers and trade unionists, illustrated the paradox of Argentina's two contrasting images. In macroeconomic terms, the country has never had it so good since the thirties, when Argentina ranked as one of the 15 wealthiest countries. GDP has grown by 8 per cent in the past 12 months. Inflation, once crippling, is virtually non-existent, and foreign investment is pouring in. Since 1993, not counting the privatisation of public utilities, foreign investors have spent more than $7 billion on buying Argentine companies.

Investors are queuing to get a stake in the car and construction industries, mines and farming. This prosperous half is pressing for more privatisations, greater deregulation and a free market.

Menem, who firmly set the country on a neoliberal course seven years ago, cannot reconcile the interests of the dominant class with mounting social unrest. Negotiations on the introduction of more flexible labour laws resulted in the government reaching an agreement this month with the Argentine trade union federation, CGT, but not with the big industrial companies.

For the past three months, a huge white marquee has stood in front of the Congress building in Buenos Aires. It houses teachers on hunger strike to protest against their paltry salaries and the lack of funds going into education. The biggest teachers' union claims that teachers now get only 37 per cent of their 1980 pay.



Masked faces of protest on the streets of Buenos Aires this month

The marquee has become a national symbol. Every day there are demonstrations of solidarity, not only from the public, but from politicians, showbiz personalities and first-division footballers.

The sharp discrepancy between these two faces of Argentina is at the centre of debate in the run-up to October 26's parliamentary byelections, a litmus test for the 1999 presidential election.

Another paradox was recently pointed out by the finance minister, Roque Fernandez, when he stated that the only opposition to the government came from the ranks of Peronists in power. He was referring to scathing criticism of the government's economic policy by the Peronist Eduardo Duhalde, the governor of Buenos Aires province and the candidate best-placed to succeed Menem as president (the Constitution does not allow him to stand for a third term).

Duhalde has tried to distance himself from Menem by calling for greater social justice. Yet Buenos Aires province, the most populated province with almost a third of the country's population of 33 million, has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

Duhalde's record has been tarnished by corruption scandals involving the police of his province, including the unsolved murder of photojournalist Jose Luis Cabezas in January. He is banking on his wife to help him win the October election. Hilda Duhalde, who will lead the Peronist list of parliamentary candidates, likes to be compared to the legendary Evita. She has organised an impressive social aid structure that has an annual budget of $180 million and employs 20,000 women to help the poorest sections of the communities.

Twenty-three years after the death of Peron, Plaza de Mayo continues to be the venue of mass demonstrations, but political debate in Argentina seems still to take place only within Peronist ranks.

(July 17)

Farm issues dominate EU enlargement

Natalie Nougayrède

AGRICULTURE is one of the trickiest issues affecting the enlargement of the European Union to the east.

The farm sector occupies an important place in the economies of central Europe: one in four Poles is a farmer; the figures for Hungary and the Czech Republic are 8.5 and 4.7 per cent respectively, but the recorded decrease in the number of farmers in those two countries since 1989 would seem to be mainly due to statistical reclassification. They compare with an EU average of 5.8 per cent.

Since the fall of communism, farming in central Europe has undergone — and continues to undergo — major changes. It was hard hit by the deep recession that followed the disappearance of the socialist model. "Between 1989 and 1994, the overall fall in GDP was 20 per cent on average. By way of comparison, Hungary's GDP fell by 'only' 10 per cent during the Depression of 1929-33," says the Hungarian economist, Tibor Palankai.

After a crisis of that magnitude, sweeping restructuring became necessary. Land was decollectivised, privatised or returned to its original owners. Big state farms and co-operatives went over to the private sector. New markets were explored. Almost 90 per cent of all arable land was privatised.

The results vary considerably from one region to another. It is hard to compare, for example, southern Hungary, where large farms are making efforts to modernise and become profitable, and the northeast of the country where the agricultural foodstuffs sector, which once relied on Soviet markets, is now struggling.

There are differences between countries. The Czech Republic and Hungary have gone all out for corporate farming. Big farms inherited from the socialist period have been transformed into limited companies. Farmers still enjoy the relative comfort of being salaried workers, the difference with the past being that their employer may now go bust.

Polish agriculture consists mainly of small and medium-sized farms — a pattern similar to that found in the EU. But Poland's micro-farm system is not geared to any development policy. Its role is mainly social: it makes it possible to employ those who lost out during the transition to democracy, in many cases people unable to find jobs in the cities.

The new privately-owned farms are starved of capital. Banks turn a deaf ear to their demands, as do foreign investors. The central European governments' response to the farming crisis — the fall in output that continued until 1995, and the loss of some export markets — has been to try to set up farm support systems.

The Czech government has created a system of long-term, low-interest loans to help farmers to buy equipment. There are high hopes, particularly in Poland, that the EU will eventually replace government subsidy systems with a well-financed rural development strategy.

If the EU is enlarged, how competitive will Polish, Czech and Hungarian products be? Not very, to judge from recent surveys. "Farm-gate prices of pigs, chickens, eggs, milk and beef in those countries are very similar to, and sometimes higher than, those in the EU," according to Alain Pouliquen, head of research at France's National Agricultural Research Institute.

Cereal exporters, especially in Hungary, have a good chance of making the grade, thanks to their low prices. But low yields may limit their export volumes. Pouliquen says that farm productivity stands at about 10 per cent of the EU average in Poland, 20 per cent in the Czech Republic, and 35 per cent in Hungary.

When Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic join the EU, they will have to lift customs barriers with all other member states. This will turn those countries not into exporters of farm produce but, on the contrary, will create ready markets for west Europeans to exploit.

But the central European agricultural foodstuffs sector has one or two feathers in its cap, including the restructuring of the Polish dairy sector, mainly thanks to investment by the French company Danone.

Polish dairy products have found many outlets in eastern Europe, as well as in cities that were once part of the Soviet Union — and whose demands, in terms of quality and marketing are much lower than those of EU countries.

(July 17)

Cohabitation marked by verbal spats

Olivier Biffaud
and Michel Noblecourt

SIX weeks after the French right lost the snap election called by President Jacques Chirac, the power-sharing arrangement, or "cohabitation", between the president and prime minister, Lionel Jospin, has entered a less courteous and more combative phase.

In a television interview he gave on July 14 — Bastille Day — Chirac tried to redefine the president's role in the Fifth Republic's third "cohabitation". He wanted to make it clear to Jospin that he intends fully to exercise both his right to pass judgment on the government's performance, and his constitutional prerogatives in the running of the country.

No one expected Chirac to adopt such a combative stance. He criticised almost every measure already taken by the Jospin government.

For François Hollande, first secretary of the Socialist party, "Chirac spoke both as a head of state who, after a dissolution of parliament that had an unfortunate outcome for him and his friends, wants to defend his territory, and as a politician who feels nostalgic about Alain Juppé's programme."

Jospin went on the counterattack at the council of ministers two days later. He reminded Chirac of Articles 5 and 20 of the Constitution, which define the respective prerogatives of the president and the prime minister. In his view the president, who on Bastille Day had propounded a policy that had been rejected by voters, could not disregard the fact that there had been a change of government.

When, at the beginning of the first "cohabitation" in 1986, President François Mitterrand refused to sign a decree authorising the privatisation legislation the government wanted to introduce, Chirac, then prime minister, told television viewers that the president was opposing the clearly expressed wishes of the majority of French voters. He insisted on being granted the legitimacy that the general election a few months earlier had bestowed on him as prime minister.

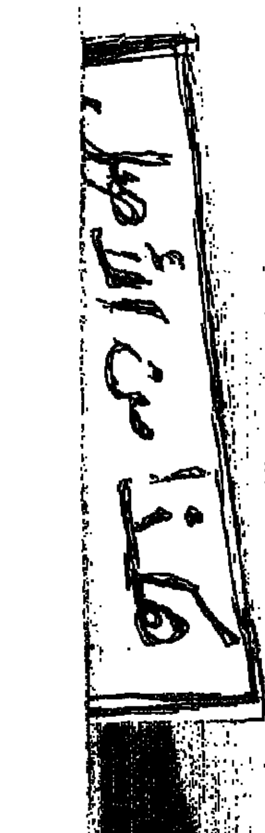
The same day, the then government spokesman, Juppé, insisted that the government, which had been elected by the people, should have "the final say". That was precisely the expression used by Chirac on July 14, the difference being that on that occasion he was talking about it as a presidential prerogative.

After the July 16 council of ministers, a spokeswoman for the presidency said that Chirac hoped the "cohabitation" would be "constructive" and that he would "continue, when he thought it necessary, to tell the French what he thought of major issues affecting France's future".

According to a minister present at the meeting, Chirac told those present that he would, of course, let the goverment get on with the act of governing.

(July 17)

Chirac's folly, page 18



Debunking Gorky

Nicolas Weill

Le Mystère Gorky
by Arcadi Vaksberg
translated from the Russian
by Dimitri Sesemann
Albin Michel 453pp 150 francs

WHEN Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917, the Russian writer Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, better known as Maxim Gorky, was at the peak of his fame. He was as widely read and celebrated as his contemporaries Tolstoy and Chekhov, who had died in 1910 and 1904 respectively.

In Le Mystère Gorky, Arcadi Vaksberg demonstrates how Gorky's popularity was exploited by the Soviet regime during the remaining 19 years of his life after the October Revolution.

Caught in an ever tightening noose, Gorky was forced to become a puppet in the hands of his Soviet masters. While he was an eternal rebel against authority up until 1917, his reputation as a writer and as a man gradually went into decline after that date.

Le Mystère Gorki, which is based on some of the most recent evidence discovered in the Russian archives, unashamedly sets out to debunk Gorky. Yet the further one gets into the book the less damning its verdict seems to be. The final impression it gives is that Gorky's biggest mistake was to have overestimated the degree to which the rulers of the Kremlin were swayed by his international reputation.

Vaksberg claims that neither Lenin nor Stalin had a high opinion of Gorky, despite the honours and bear-hugs which they constantly chose to lavish on him in public. On the other hand, they regarded his reputation as something out of which they could make political capital, even if it meant making a few concessions, as is usually necessary when securing the services of a prominent "fellow traveller".

Gorky was perfectly prepared to intercede on behalf of people when he felt the need. But, as Vaksberg demonstrates, his generous attitude had the perverse effect of creating a "Gorkyan" network of protégés and hangers-on.

Gorky's influence was anyway limited by the fact that from 1922 to 1933 he lived in Sorrento, Italy. In 1921 his letters to Lenin were not compelling enough to persuade the Soviet leader to authorise the poet Alexander Blok to go to Finland for medical treatment (with the result that Blok died prematurely).

Apart from its extremely exhaustive account of Gorky's affairs with various women, the main interest of Vaksberg's book is that it shows, once again, the extent to which a regime like the Soviet Union, which saw itself as resolutely modernist in outlook, was deeply imbued with the antediluvian ethos of ethnic solidarity and clan networking that spawns nepotism at every level.

The reason, for example, why Genrish Yagoda, head of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD, a predecessor of the KGB), was such a close friend of Gorky's was that, like the writer, he hailed from Nizhni Novgorod (the city that went under the name of Gorky from 1932 to 1990).

Much has been written about the notorious visit, organised by the NKVD, which Gorky undertook in 1929 to the first of the Soviet camps, on the Solovky Islands: after allowing the wool to be pulled over his eyes, he described the camp in glowing and reassuring terms.

Less well known is the way, shortly after 1917, that Gorky helped himself to antiques (particularly antique weapons) which the regime had confiscated from collectors on the pretext of "preserving cultural values". Vaksberg accuses Gorky of having organised the whole scam.

It is difficult, given one's knowledge of the great terror that Stalin unleashed in the mid-thirties, to understand how Gorky could have uttered sentiments like: "If your enemy doesn't surrender, you exterminate him."

It is hard not to feel a sense of shock when learning that Gorky, the prime mover of the Institute of Experimental Medicine (Viem) whose purpose was to prolong human life (particularly that of the Soviet leaders), declared in the mission statement: "Experimentation on man himself is indispensable . . . Hundreds of human units will be needed for that. It will be a veritable service to mankind, and of course more important and useful than the extermination of tens of millions of healthy individuals for the well-being of a pathetic and psychologically and morally degenerate class of predators and parasites."



Maxim Gorky: a reappraisal of his life does nothing for his stature

It is a pity that Vaksberg leaves a number of such "mysteries" completely unsolved, though he illustrates them with documents of all kinds. He gives no explanation, for example, for the way Gorky, who up to 1918 had had sympathies with the Social Democrats, suddenly switched his allegiance to the communists, about whom, early on, he had no illusions.

The theory that Gorky later tried to counter Stalin by putting his money on Sergei Kirov — whose murder on December 1, 1934, marked the beginning of a new wave of terror — is an attractive one, but it remains no more than a supposition.

And then there is the mystery of Gorky's death on June 18, 1936. Did he die of an illness, or was he poisoned by Stalin, who saw him as a friend of his enemy, Bukharin? Vaksberg seems to plump for the poisoning theory, but is unable to clinch his case.

Le Mystère Gorky does nothing to enhance Gorky's stature. But his works, which Vaksberg mentions only in passing, will endure.

(July 12)

Cocteau off the shelf

Michel Cournot

ONE of the quirks of the book world is that new information about great writers is often revealed not by a biography, monograph or ... but by something more straightforwardly commercial: a bookseller's catalogue.

Authors sometimes shelve a major work or give it to a friend. Years go by, then death and financial straits may result in the manuscript being offered to a publisher — which involves uncertainties and delays — or to an immediate taker: a bookseller.

The bookseller then reveals its existence and quotes a few lines from it, either in an auction catalogue or in one of his own. Specialists, aware the work was written, assume it to have been lost for ever or its existence may not have been suspected, in which case its re-emergence can change our perception of the writer and his or her whole oeuvre.

A Geneva bookseller has just published a Jean Cocteau catalogue. In it, we learn of the existence of Elisabeth Par..., a three-act kitsch comedy Cocteau wrote in 1912. It is set in an Italian lakeside palazzo and carries a strong whiff of ...

This ties up with another little-known Cocteau work mentioned in the catalogue, Isola Bella, a fine long poem of 1910, which evokes a trip to the island that Cocteau and his mother appear to have made three years after his father's suicide.

The catalogue also includes Cocteau's translation of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, which dates from 1912-14, and which experts believed lost. Cocteau's numerous annotations in the margin of the manuscript throw a completely new light on the creation of the Diaghilev ballet Parade (1917), whose libretto was a major milestone in Cocteau's literary ...

(July 4)

Chirac aloof author of his own downfall

Gérard Courtois

Un Secret d'Etat
by Denis Jeambar
Editions Odile Jacob 194pp 90 francs

NO ONE could accuse Denis Jeambar, editor of the weekly news magazine, L'Express, of hunting with the hounds. As long ago as last autumn, he splashed a resounding "Enough is enough!" across the front page of his paper as a message to President Jacques Chirac. Before that, he had charted the crisis of confidence which was undermining the nation 18 months after Chirac's election. Now that the French right has lost the general election, Jeambar is at it again.

The 194 pages of this vitriolic indictment, written with passion and style, attempt to explain the mysterious reasons that led Chirac to make such a monumental blunder: he put his seven-year presidential term in the balance by taking the gamble of calling a snap election, without apparently realising what kind of risk he was taking, and ended up being deprived of his parliamentary majority and stripped of most of his powers.

And in the process he seriously damaged the equilibrium of France's institutions, whose architect was General Charles de Gaulle. What worse fate could there be for someone who sees himself as the keeper of the Gaullist flame?

Jeambar, like many other analysts, pins the blame for the fiasco on the team of advisers who kept on breathing down Chirac's neck, cooped him up in the Elysée Palace, cut him off from the real world, and robbed him of his antennae and his flair.

The former prime minister, Alain Juppé, gets most of the blame. Jeambar is scathing: "The minute he set foot in the Hôtel Matignon [the prime minister's office], [Juppé] displayed the faults that were to prove his undoing: an unbridled ambition that brooks no rival, a total inability to show any nobility of mind, an autocratic temperament that stifles any generosity of spirit, and a deafening arrogance that sparks unusually violent reactions".

But Juppé was not alone. Dominique de Villepin, general secretary at the Elysée, and Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, Juppé's chief adviser, had had a hand in every aspect of policy since the autumn of 1994.

Blinded by the success of the Chirac-Juppé ticket eight months later, the duo got it into their heads that the president and his prime minister "were invincible, that an election can always be won, that public opinion can always be turned around, that the press can be manipulated, that power cannot be shared . . . They believed in their masters, but they also believed that they had become masters". Their sin was one of pride.

Unlike many observers, Jeambar believes Chirac himself to have been the main person responsible for his failure as a president. His personality, he argues, lies at the heart of events. "A man of instinct" rather than a strategist, Chirac "pursues his political advantage without asking himself how he will handle things later on . . . Even when he goes through the motions of projecting himself into the future, he is living only for the present".

The great misunderstanding that lay at the heart of the 1995 presidential campaign was entirely due to that confusion of priorities: to destabilise his rival Edouard Balladur and give himself some political breathing space, Chirac played at being a leftist.

But "the sorcerer's apprentice" did such a good job of it, with all his talk of the "social fracture", that he was "trapped" and did not know how to "establish a link between an election campaign based on a confidence trick and a presidency that hinged on a return to the truth".

But a more pathetic dimension also came into play. "The key to the disaster lies in the confusion between politics and emotions," Jeambar contends. "Balladur's betrayal [by standing as a candidate against Chirac] removed his last illusions about the human race, if he still had any . . . It was, then, a totally disillusioned person" who became president in May 1995, someone who had become disenchanted with ... ties at the very moment he was taking up his place in the history books.

The "disastrous combination" of Chirac's tendency to retreat into himself and Juppé's narcissism gave rise "to an unprecedented presidential autism" and resulted in the "huge feeling of waste" that was a feature of the first two years of his presidency.

Jeambar wonders whether Chirac will be able to rise again from the ashes of "this tragic experience". To do that, he will have to free himself from the straitjacket ... donned and simply succeed in becoming president". And that, Jeambar surmises, will be "a Promethean task".

(July 4)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie C...
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PROJECT MANAGER

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Devastated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the civil war of 1992-3, families returned to their homes in 1994 which they found damaged or destroyed. Many of the men in these families were killed or afraid to return, leaving female headed households very vulnerable and with little economic independence. SCF's programme initially aimed to support these women in rebuilding their lives and their confidence, to gain access to services and contribute to the process of reconciliation.

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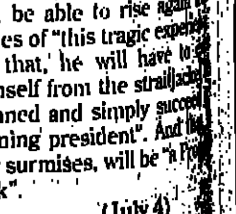
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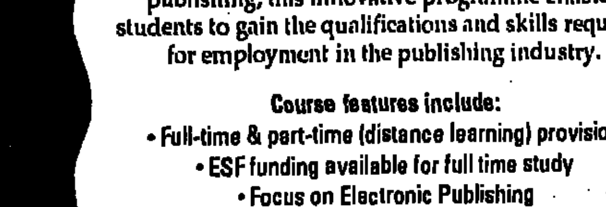
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Kramer versus Kramer's alma mater

After provoking a storm of protest among fellow gays, accusing them of being obsessed with sex, he has now taken on America's straight establishment to create a place for gay studies at Yale University. **Mark Tran** on the battles of Larry Kramer

"WE CREATED a culture that in essence killed us. It's time, therefore, to admit that and to create a new culture not so sexually-centred," says Larry Kramer, screenwriter, poet, novelist and Aids activist, as he finishes his toasted Portobello mushroom sandwich.

Such remarks have angered many gays. They accuse Kramer of trying to impose Victorian values on a culture that positively celebrates sexuality, in a manner typified by The Farewell Symphony, latest novel by Edmund White, considered America's foremost gay writer. Kramer has denounced the book as irresponsible, as well as heartless and boring, for its non-stop depiction of faceless sex.

"Surely life was more than this, even for — especially for — Edmund White. He did not spend 30 years with a non-stop erection and an asshole busier than his toilet," Kramer writes, in characteristically blunt style, in the gay and lesbian magazine the Advocate. Kramer, who lives with his longtime lover, architect David Webster, asserts that gay writers have cheapened the gay experience by constantly harping on about sex.

"One thing our writers are not teaching us about is love," he goes on. "How to love another. How to love another gay. How to love ourselves. Or respect. How to respect each other and ourselves." Kramer's own contribution to the gay novel genre was Faggots, written in 1978, which contains more than its share of graphic sex scenes as the hero, Fred Lemish, eventually gives up the handsome Dinky because the relationship is not based on commitment and love.

For someone who tested HIV-positive in 1986, but who believes he was infected years earlier, Kramer, now 62, knows he is living on borrowed time. With intimations of mortality he has nailed his colours to the mast in the culture wars that are flaring anew within the gay community. He deplores the return of unsafe sex, prevalent in the 1970s, voicing opinions that have earned him the hatred of many gays. "You cannot have sex indiscriminately with multiple partners, who are also doing the same, without spreading disease, a disease that has for many years also carried death. Nature always extracts a price for sexual promiscuity," writes Kramer, who attributes the return of unsafe sex partly to the development of protease inhibitors, drug cocktails which have slowed the onset of Aids. These allow gays, he argues, to indulge in unprotected sex in the belief that the new drugs provide a sort of safety net.

He criticises Andrew Sullivan, the British journalist and former editor of the New Republic, for going overboard on the effectiveness of protease inhibitors. In an article in the New York Times magazine earlier this year Sullivan, also HIV positive, argued that, thanks to the new treatment, Aids has become manageable and death no longer an inevitable consequence. Kramer, who has not taken protease inhibitors, believes the effect of such medication lasts only a couple of years.

In addition to his tirades against the gay obsession with sex, Kramer has taken on the straight establishment, battling with Yale University in a bid to win a permanent place for gay studies at America's top university. Kramer went to Yale in 1953, following in the footsteps of his father, his older brother and two uncles. It was not a happy time. He was an English literature student, and was just discovering his homosexuality in a fraternity-centred institution. He tried to commit suicide, and after his stomach was pumped out he was told he could stay if he went into therapy. Four decades later he has just had another unhappy episode with Yale: the university has spurned his offer of several million dollars for a tenured professorship in gay studies and a gay student centre.

It was a replay of an incident two years ago, when Yale returned a $20 million offer from another alumnus, Lee Bass. Kramer has just broken off nine months of negotiations carried on through an exchange of letters and conversations with Yale's provost, Alison Richard. The stumbling block was his demand for a permanent chair, which the university considers an intrusion into its academic independence.

"Larry Kramer is clearly a passionate advocate and very creative writer," Dr Richard told the New York Times. "But my task is not to honour or give in to passionate advocates. My task is to figure out what is in Yale's interests."

Kramer acknowledges that Yale does offer courses on gay and lesbian studies, but argues that the issue is one of permanence. "I'm not willing to fund visiting professorships — I want somebody there when I die. To me it is unconscionable and unacceptable for them to use the money that way, especially when it's my money," says Kramer, who made his fortune partly from a lucrative stint as a screenwriter in the 1960s, a decade spent mostly in London. Kramer's most notable success was Women In Love, which he produced and for which he wrote the screenplay. He became a millionaire about 10 years ago, thanks to the investing acumen of his brother.

KRAMER kept plugging away at Yale, despite what he describes as its snooty attitude, because of its reputation as America's foremost university. A breakthrough there and the rest of America's academic establishment would have followed. But he has now withdrawn his offer. "In backing away from this Yale thing without my usual gritty attitude, I've learned that I'm bigger and better than Yale and my money's too good for them," he asserts.

Legitimising gay and lesbian studies is the latest in a long line of crusades for Kramer, who founded in 1981 Gay Men's Health Crisis, an organisation he now disowns as "a bunch of ninnies. He accuses GMHC of failing to push Washington hard enough on Aids research, setting back the cause five or six years. He went on to form a more radical offshoot Act Up (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power), now just a shell organisation in the US, although the Paris branch is active, recently sheathing the obelisk on the Place de la Concorde with a giant condom. GMHC meanwhile remains the largest Aids advocacy group in the United States.

Establishing a permanent professorship at Yale is a natural continuation of Kramer's activism. "The next battle is getting stuff taught in schools," he says. "We lived through Aids, now we have to document all of that."

Perhaps his ultimate document will be the long novel that he has been working on for the past 20 years, now running into 2,000 pages. Entitled The American People, it will be a fictional history of America, telling the story of gays' contribution to the republic.

"One of the many things I've learned is that history isn't very truthful. It has not been very inclusive of gays, and my book will be one in which gays play a much more important part than people realise. For example, there is evidence that Abraham Lincoln had a very intense and passionate four-year love affair with a man called Joshua Speed," Kramer says, a contention sure to set the cat amongst the pigeons among historians, already in a tizzy because of the theory that President Thomas Jefferson had a long affair with a slave.

Apart from his magnum opus, Kramer is also working on a project to collect data about HIV on a secure Internet site with the backing of IBM and its Lotus subsidiary. The idea is that every person with HIV can enter data on the site, literally on a daily basis, to provide information on what combination of drugs he or she is taking. From that mass of information, Kramer hopes to provide a database that will allow doctors to discover what treatments work best. "This is historic because such data has never been collected," says Kramer, clearly excited about the project. He may be living on borrowed time, but Kramer is making full use of the moments left to him.

Perhaps his ultimate document will be the long novel he has been working on for the past 20 years, telling the story of gays' contribution to America. 'History hasn't been very inclusive of gays, and in my book they will play a much more important part than people realise'



Nailing his colours to the mast . . . gay campaigner Larry Kramer tested positive for HIV in 1986, and knows he is living on borrowed time

Every Interne[t] crash has a silver lining

Joanna Coles in New Yo[rk]

THERE is a crucial scen[e in] Roberts's new movie [M]y [Best] Friend's Wedding, in which [she] is anxious to retrieve her ex-bo[yfriend] from his new fiancée, send[ing a] bogus e-mail. Purporting to b[e] his father-in-law, it suggests [he find] himself a proper job instead [of roam]ing around as a sports report[er. The] ex-boyfriend receives it, be[lieves it] to be genuine and uses it as [an ex]cuse to call off the wedding.

What is striking about this [is that] the villain is not Roberts, wh[o is] the communication mischie[f-maker,] but the e-mail itself.

Three years ago, e-mail w[as re]ceived in America as a god[send.] Remember Disclosure, [the] woman who sexually har[assed a] man? There, the hero was [saved by an on]screen e-mail which provide[d] clues for Michael Dougl[as to de]stroy Demi Moore. The mes[sage was] clear. E-mail is good. Now, [after last] week's Internet crash, which [caused] millions of e-mails to be re[turned to] sender, America is not so su[re.]

The repositioning of e-[mail as] bad guy may be subtle, but [there is] ambivalence towards the [growing] reliance on electronic [mail. You] could almost hear the collec[tive sigh] of relief across the United S[tates when] the system crashed last wee[k.]

It was frustrating, but [it was a] respite. A genuine excuse [to get] on and discover that omi[...]ing instruction.

The average middle-ma[nager in] the United States may now e[xpect to] send or receive 178 electr[onic mes]sages or documents a day. [Many] think that if it isn't on pap[er] they're not burdening you. [A] survey discovered 71 per c[ent of] managers feel overwhelmed [by the] volume of messages.

Last week's crash will [in]crease nervousness about the [relia]bility of e-mail. As the surve[y goes] on to show, new technolog[y doesn't] actually replace previous fo[rms of] communication, it simply ad[ds to them be]cause few people believe e-[mail] gets there. This has l[ed to] "bundling", where people se[nd an] e-mail, then a fax to check the[y] got there, and then call the m[...] to check they got the fax t[o tell] them about the e-mail.

Faxual harassment, the e[quiva]lent of junk mail, is anoth[er un]wanted development, as is e[-mail] harassment, which is wildly [on the] increase. Over half of Am[ericans] say they have received [...] "flame-mail", which psychi[atrists] claim is the most sophisticat[ed form] of office bullying.

Managers unable to face pe[rsonal] confrontation fire off aggr[essive] missives. Cruel 'lovers' u[nable to] cope with the guilt of endi[ng rela]tionships have even ended [them] with e-mail.

Last week I received a [...] chain e-mail. It was a frantic [ap]peal for a cancer society. [It] claimed it originated at the [White] House and was convincin[g...] sanctimonious petition.

"Occasionally we get to [use this] medium for some actual [good] rather than trading barbs acr[oss the air]waves! And once in a while [things] like this bring us back to [...], al]lowing us to count ourselves [...] in life. Let's put our network [to work] here!" I spiked it immediately

Lost and found in the world's largest maze

Paul Webster in Reignac sur Indre rediscovers the past at an environmentally friendly corn labyrinth

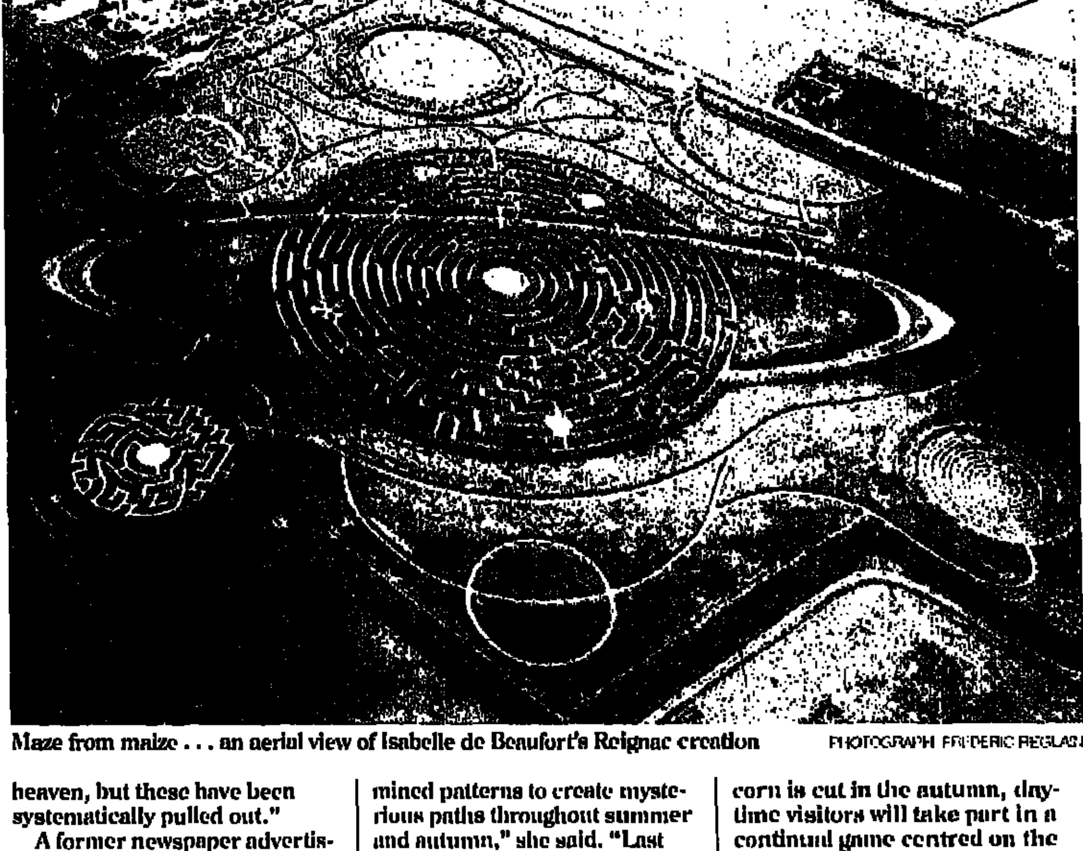
FROM a helicopter 70m above the world's biggest maze, families can be seen wandering through nearly 5km of green-fringed alleyways, enjoying the age-old pastime of getting lost.

The bird's-eye view is of a ringed planet among satellites, each with logical geometrical patterns that look more like easily read maps than puzzles.

But on the ground the logic is lost among the 2m-high, strictly aligned cornfields. They provide the framework for frustration and eventual triumph, essential to the mythology of labyrinths representing humankind's ability to overcome the setbacks of life.

Isabelle de Beaufort, the dynamic force behind this new form of environmentally friendly tourism — which is shortly to be exported to Britain — believes that the concept of temporary labyrinths among growing crops could bring about a resurgence of interest in a pastime that has seen dozens of pagan and religious forms since prehistory.

"I have been cataloguing European mazes and there seem to be only about 100 left, about 60 per cent in Britain," she said. "Unfortunately, even in Britain many of them are in a poor state. In France, a labyrinth engraved in the floors of cathedrals was a normal feature which pilgrims traced on their knees to symbolise a chequered voyage to heaven, but these have been systematically pulled out."



Maze from maize . . . an aerial view of Isabelle de Beaufort's Reignac creation PHOTOGRAPH: FREDERIC REGLAIN

A former newspaper advertising manager, Ms de Beaufort decided to create her new form of labyrinth near Reignac village, south of the Loire, after her partner, Bernard Ramus, an architect, read an article about a maze among fields of maize in the United States.

"The farmer had cut swathes through growing corn but we developed a technique in which the corn is planted in pre-determined patterns to create mysterious paths throughout summer and autumn," she said. "Last year, we experimented on a small scale and more than 80,000 people turned up — 3,000 in one day. This year, there are 37 acres and six different styles of mazes that represent English, African and Scandinavian patterns."

Thousands of people spent the nights of the full moon among the fields south of Tours with jugglers and conjurers. Until the corn is cut in the autumn, daytime visitors will take part in a continual game centred on the Wizard Of Oz, in which 20 actors will either guide or mislead confused families heading for the magician's lair.

In the meantime, Ms de Beaufort has been making a list of surviving mazes in the belief that a labyrinth revival is imminent.

Existing European designs are mostly inspired by the Renaissance, when Italian influence encouraged the rich to build outdoor theatres or secret meeting places among sculpted hedges of box or yew. In Scandinavia, petal-shaped labyrinths have their origins in pagan rites, while other styles exist in Asia and Africa.

But her catalogue of French church mazes makes sad reading. Known as Jerusalem sites, they were once part of a chain leading to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, but most were destroyed in the 19th century, in one case because children used to play on them during mass. There are still examples at Amiens, Bayeux and Chartres, but the most spectacular, at Saint-Omer in the Pas de Calais, where the stones were deeply worn by pilgrims' knees, has been destroyed.

Ms de Beaufort's hopes of a revival have been encouraged by international interest in the Reignac project, which has revealed a network of modern labyrinth designers. Inevitably, Reignac's biggest-in-the-world title is already under threat from planned temporary or permanent mazes in Austria and Switzerland.

But her copyrighted methods, which require the co-operation of a landscape gardener and an artist, have been transplanted to Belgium this year and talks have started with partners in Britain.

"We seem to have struck a sympathetic chord with a public looking for something more peaceful and more thoughtful than commercial theme parks," Ms de Beaufort said as she talked of changing the Reignac maze's design after this year's harvest. "But when you are faced with nothing except a sodden ploughed field in February, it needs a lot of courage to restart planting."

Death by a thousand drops of water

Arsenic contamination of water in Bangladesh threatens millions, writes **Suzanne Goldenberg**

A DISASTER is in the making in Bangladesh, where tens of millions of people are being slowly poisoned by arsenic which has seeped into the water supply in the southern half of the country.

Colourless, odourless and tasteless, arsenic is a stealthy killer; other than switching to safe drinking water, there is no cure. Activists argue that the sheer scale of the contamination qualifies it as a natural disaster, although one that is slower moving than the other calamities that have afflicted one of the world's poorest countries.

"It is possible that almost half of Bangladesh is at risk," said Dr Mahmuder Rahman of the Dhaka Community Hospital. Earlier this year doctors collected skin, hair and nail samples and tested water from villages throughout Bangladesh, detecting dangerously high levels of arsenic in 34 southern districts housing more than 50 million.

In Char Ruppur village, which nestles among jackfruit and mango trees about 16km from the western town of Pabna, they found perhaps the most toxic water in Bangladesh. Here the concentrations of arsenic in wells has reached 2.09 milligrams per litre of water — more than 200 times the World Health Organisation's maximum of 0.01mg a litre.



Hasina Begum's hands carry the lesions that indicate arsenic poisoning. PHOTO: ATLAF HOSSAIN

Many of the families in the mud-plastered homes have lost relatives to a sickness they now blame on arsenic. Hasina Begum, thin and sheathed in a black printed sari, says she believes her brother-in-law and his wife died because they were drinking the water from the hand-pump in their shared courtyard.

Government engineers sealed the well earlier this year — but too late for Hasina Begum, who holds out a palm crossed with the lesions that indicate arsenic poisoning. She says her strength is oozing away and her feet and palms are burning. "I know that I will die of this one day," she says.

Seven people are reported to have died of arsenic poisoning in surrounding villages, but local activists and international agencies believe most of its victims in Bangladesh have gone unnoticed. So far, the government has counted only 700 people showing the symptomatic blackened skin and lesions.

"It may just be that we have another decade before we can expect huge health problems," says Dauda Wurie, Unicef's water and sanitation officer in Bangladesh.

The slow poison is scything through an ever younger population. In Bilkada village, a few kilometres down the road from Char Ruppur, Shahnara Khatoon, a shy 15-year-old, turns delicate fingers with red nail varnish to reveal the tell-tale lesions. In time the raised bumps will merge into a yellow-brown crust on her hands and feet, and the arsenic will leave deposits which can cause cancers in her internal organ and on her skin. Doctors say she may recover if she drinks safe water.

But her mother, Asiya, who scrimped for years to buy the eczema creams ordered by a doctor unaware of the symptoms of arsenic poisoning, admits that they have cracked open the seal on their well.

In part, it was desperation — there is no other nearby source of water — but it was also a result of public health campaigns to persuade rural Bangladeshis to forgo pond and river water, which is prey to bacterial diseases.

Since 1980 Bangladesh has installed 2.8 million shallow, hand-pump tubewells in village homes. Local topography — water lies relatively close to the earth's surface — cheap technology and instalment plans that kept the price of a shallow well at about $35, have given 98 per cent of the population access to hitherto safe drinking water.

But in a cruel twist, it is these pumps that are proving the most susceptible to poisoning. Geologists say that the arsenic, which occurs naturally in subsoils has probably been seeping into the water supply for decades. It has spread more quickly in recent years, possibly because more water is being pumped.

THE EXTENT of contamination is not known, even through the government certainly had an inkling of the problem 10 years ago. In the 1980s doctors detected wide-scale arsenic poisoning in the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal, and experts in Calcutta advised the Dhaka government in 1990 that millions of its people could be exposed to the same toxins. Desperate to avoid a panic, and woefully ill-equipped to deal with the problem, the government remained silent.

Angry representatives of international agencies accuse Sheikh Hasina Wajed's government of the most craven cynicism. Elected only 11 months ago, it is unwilling to assume responsibility for a problem it inherited.

"You can not call it a disaster. It's not an immediate effect. You have to drink the water for very many years, and we have been observing it for the last four or five years only," said Aminuddin Ahmed, the chief public health engineer and a member of the National Committee on Arsenic.

"First of all we have to determine the extent of the problem before we get a solution. In one place, one type of solution is required, and another solution may be required in another situation."

But even the government admits that there has been little action since the committee was set up in 1994. Mr Aminuddin's department, charged with providing clean drinking water, has taken on no new staff and so far only 200 tubewells have been sunk to replace the 600 tainted ones sealed. Mr Ahmed admits that Bangladesh simply cannot afford to supply drinking water by tanker to remote areas.

Meanwhile the people of Char Ruppur are coming to terms with their likely fate. At first the victims of arsenic poisoning were shunned by neighbours, who mistook the lesions for leprosy. Now, as more sicken, the old prejudices have fallen away.

"When I first used to take water from other houses, they yelled at me and drove me away," Hasina Begum recalls, "People told us not to touch anything near their house. But now, when most people are infected, they don't bother."

Early to bed keeps a legend funky

JAZZ
Adam Sweeting

RAY CHARLES is 66, but he seems so permanent that he might as well be 166, or 566. Brought up on a healthy diet of blues, jazz and R&B, the Georgia-born "legendary genius of soul" has been able to sidestep neatly around trends like rock 'n' roll or disco, and merely keep on perfecting his idiosyncratic interpretations of soul classics and pop or country standards.

An evening with Ray Charles is also an evening with his 17-piece backing ensemble, since he holds back his own appearance until the band has worked up a bit of sweat, blown the smog out of their lungs and popped their knuckles. But after three lengthy instrumental numbers which dug progressively deeper into big band cliché, one began to wonder if Ray had been mislaid by the baggage handlers at London airport.

He was only teasing. In a crimson shirt, bow tie and those permanent sunglasses, Charles was escorted to the keyboard by an immense minder. Soon he was into the mellow chords of Georgia On My Mind, wheezing and whooping the lyrics according to his own mysterious sense of time and pitch. The way Charles gives himself so much room to stretch notes, slide chords and build in spaces where it had never occurred to you that there could be any, while remaining synchronised with the band, grows out of the understanding that can only emerge through decades of pounding the boards.

Still, the maestro appeared restless and tetchy, giving his soundman an earbashing for turning his microphone up too loud, and treating his bass player to sarcasm that didn't go down well with its victim. Could there be a hint of tyrannical bandleader behind Charles's trademark expression of grinning, head-thrown-back bliss?

The arrival of the five-piece Raelettes seemed to cheer Ray up. He engaged a higher gear for a funky, country-soul treatment of I Can't Stop Loving You, and put sizzle into I Believe To My Soul with violent left-hand keyboard flourishes. But just as it seemed that the legend might be finding the groove, the MC declared that that was all, folks. Even genius sometimes needs an early night.

***John Fordham adds*: On paper, there's no better combination of famously talented fortysomething postbop gurus than the Herbie Hancock New Standard Allstars. But if this generally exhilarating jam had a downside, it was that in a band of leaders, nobody has ever heard of a short solo.**

This is often the price of staging the kind of all-star extravaganzas that does much to promote jazz to wider audiences and expand the reputations of great players like all six on this gig (as well as Hancock, Mike Brecker, John Scofield, Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette and Don Alias formidably shared the percussion). And there were plenty of moments to occasion a sharp intake of breath — such as Hancock's mix of quicksilver and dynamite in solos on songs by Peter Gabriel and Prince.

Dave Holland, a bassist of solid circuitousness on the few slow tunes and a darting intensity on fast ones, delivered a sublime solo on Norwegian Wood and a ferocious one on Stevie Wonder's You Got It Bad Girl.

This band of greats had the ears and the experience to be a great band. Maybe musicality and the circus-act virtuosity required for this kind of roadshow just don't mix.

Garden of delights

GALA
Edward Greenfield

IF ANYONE felt apprehensive about the future of the Royal Opera House, no one was showing it at the Farewell Gala. After all the disasters and criticisms, this was a gala of enjoyment and hope, closing an era at Covent Garden before 2½ years of renovation and rebuilding, but pointing forward to another time.

It turned out to be as starry an event as you could ever want, culminating in the return of Placido Domingo as an incomparable Otello in the final scene of Verdi's opera, preceded by a much younger superstar, already bitingly powerful in Iago's creed, Bryn Terfel.

Terfel also led the ensemble in the final fugue from Verdi's last opera, Falstaff, again conducted by Sir Georg Solti, music director laureate, at 84 as electric as ever.

Special ovations came earlier for Sir Colin Davis as another previous music director, and for Edward Downes, now in his 45th year conducting the Royal Opera, an inspired interpreter here of Puccini, Donizetti and Verdi.

Yet the hero of the occasion, was Bernard Haitink. Music director extraordinary, inspirer and wise leader as well as searching interpreter, he alone in all the wrangles has remained untouched by criticism. By including big ensemble works like Wagner's Parsifal and Boito's Mefistofele, he hopes to keep the company together.

As always in such events, the main problem was cramming everyone in, and ensembles were the order of the day. With ballet splendid party pieces came from magnetic dancers Sylvie Guillem, Darcy Bussell, Irek Mukhamedov and Tetsuya Kumakawa.

The one operatic item fully staged was the pub scene from Britten's Peter Grimes, with the storm raging outside, still electrifying in Elijah Moshinsky's skeletal production.

How apt that the first solo voices to be heard were those of two veterans, Elizabeth Bainbridge as Auntie (32 years with the company) and Sarah Walker as Mrs Sedley, joined later not just by Anthony Rolfe Johnson, inspired in the title role, but by Heather Harper as Ellen Orford and Robert Tear as the drunken preacher, Bob Boles.



Close encounters of a profit-making kind . . . Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum), Eddie Carr (Richard Schiff) and Nick Van Owen (Vince Vaughn) come perilously close to the dinosaurs in Spielberg's latest epic

Profoundly slick dross

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

"*IF ONLY* we can step aside and trust in nature," says Richard Attenborough's John Hammond in **The Lost World: Jurassic Park,** "life will find a way." This is not the title song. He is just giving Steven Spielberg's latest super epic a nice philosophical finale. And considering that half the cast has been crunched, appropriately like popcorn, it's nice to know that the mastermind of the first movie has finally changed his ways.

Life has clearly found a way for Spielberg to profit by it in mind-boggling proportions. This is a bonanza for children of all ages, and has been so successful that it hardly needs reviews, which is just as well since, special effects apart, it looks like a director on automatic pilot, characterising his dinosaurs with more avidity than the humans.

Underneath the technical proficiency, there is nothing we haven't seen before in a hundred other monster pictures, right down to Jeff Goldblum's Ian Malcolm (no relation), whose awful warnings about interfering with nature come true in front of his eyes, and Arliss Howard's chief villain, who wants to capture the dinos as "major league toys" for display at a San Diego theme-park.

The characters are plastic and the script, taken from Michael Crichton's novel by David Koepp, is there only to make the action seamless. That was true of the first film. But it is even more true of this which, even when it has a sense of humour — a small boy wakes his parents and tells them there's a dinosaur in the garden — does not have the charm of ET.

Site B is the island where the prehistoric animals of Jurassic Park were genetically engineered and are now presumed extinct. But Hammond knows better and wants a small party of scientists to do a recce. Malcolm leaves well alone until he hears that his girl (Julianne Moore) is among them as a palaeontologist. And along with him goes his Afro-American daughter, stowed away after a quarrel about absent parenthood.

Once there, they see the dinosaurs lolloping about in friendly fashion, even allowing Ms Moore to stroke their noses. But it's not long before the baddies arrive, led by Pete Postlethwaite as a white hunter determined to bag a live bull Tyrannosaurus Rex as a trophy.

This annoys the beasties, and the film becomes a chase movie with all stops out, ending with a King Kong-like episode in America.

The special effects brook no argument, being marginally better than those of the first time round, and wrapped around the camera like chocolate around an ice-cream. That is all. The rest is amazing dross from the man who made Jaws, Close Encounters and ET — and Schindler's List. The film hasn't the visceral thrills of Jaws, the wonder of Close Encounters or the sweetness of ET, though there's a homage to each. It's just profoundly slick.

It's an old story: the ex-lover who arrives unheralded at the home of the now-married former partner, stirring up memories and desires. But old stories are often the best, and if anyone can turn the trick again you might expect to bank on Michael Frayn.

Nick Hurran's **Remember Me?** certainly has a Frayn screenplay that attempts to murder cliché, setting itself in a London suburb where Imelda Staunton's harried wife, constrained by 20 years of a dullish marriage, is suddenly presented with Robert Lindsay, heart-throb of her university days, who turns out not to want her, but some spare cash.

He's got a Rolls outside and a blonde in it (Natalie Walter), and something's gone badly wrong with his high-flying life. Unfortunately, something's gone wrong with life in suburbia, too: since hubby (Rik Mayall) has been made redundant, the two children (Tim Matthews and Emily Bruni) view their parents with sneering horror.

Under these circumstances, the gentleman caller is invited first to dinner and then to stay, with his blonde in tow. Meanwhile there are two strange men outside, waiting for the gentleman caller to emerge, with guns akimbo.

This is a comedy that intends to ape Ealing, but which turns into an out-and-out farce. The problem is that the funnier it tries to be, the less it tickles the ribs. There's a terrible sense of diminishing returns as the film cranks up towards a conclusion that's more reliant on hysterical plotting than a proper observation of either the family or its unwanted visitors (who include Brenda Blethyn and James Fleet as holidaymakers suddenly pitched into the giant mess).

In the end, Remember Me? seems to substitute pace and easy hilarity for comedic depth of focus. But it remains very well played, occasionally very funny and an apt, if highly coloured, comment on suburban desperation.

It's weird to discover a Spanish domestic comedy made substantially on a council estate in Camberwell, south London with a Spanish-speaking cast augmented by English actors. But at least Fernando Colomo's **The Butterfly Effect** (El Efecto Mariposa) justifies itself by giving a nice part to the cherishable Maria Barranco, whose performance in Pedro Almodóvar's Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown was one of the pleasures of recent years.

Barranco plays a woman nearing 40 and separated from her English actor husband who, after much hesitation, starts an affair with her visiting nephew, thus precipitating Edward Lorenz's theory of chaos (illustrated by what happens across the world when a butterfly flutters its wings). When the boy's mother turns up and beds her Trekkie neighbour (James Fleet), it looks as though Lorenz was underestimating matters considerably.

It's intrinsically a pretty silly story, and Colomo draws it out far too long. But its placing of Spanish passions amid such mundane surroundings sometimes produces sequences almost worthy of Mike Leigh, and any film with Barranco has to be watchable.

Disney's **The Lady and The Tramp** was one of the soppiest of all his animated features, and also one of the most brilliantly drawn. It arrives back in town in its full CinemaScope glory with a digitalised sound track and the reputation of being the third most successful film at the box-office of the fifties. The two that beat it were The Ten Commandments and Ben-Hur, the latter inspiring an American critic to the one-line review: Loved Ben, hated her. As far as the Disney epic goes, I loved the mutt-like Tramp and hated Lady. But then I always found Disney's anthropomorphic sentimentality hard to take. It seems more like perfectly formed kitsch now.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Don on the loose

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

THE Petipa-Gorsky Don Quixote is a huge, baggy monster of a ballet, with a ridiculously contrived plot and daft music. But in the Kirov's production, shown for the first time in Britain last week, it is also a blissful romp.

What it makes us see (which the Royal Ballet's current production doesn't) is just how close to music hall much of 19th century ballet is. Unlike the brisk, stripped-down staging of the English production, the Kirov's retains all the old creaky mime scenes, and the dancers perform them as broad, delicious farce. In the hot Spanish numbers they twirl their fans and whirl their matador cloaks with exotic heat and swagger; in the gypsy routines their eyes flash daggers and in the Vision scene they are adorably sentimental.

The point about the Kirov dancers is that they're totally unembarrassed by the work's hokiness. They may have the most rarefied classical technique in the world but they also know how to let their hair down. In fact, they generated so hilarious and holiday a mood that the audience was laughing and clapping for more, like children at their first ballet.

The dancers, who were high as kites, also kept on giving more, and no one more than Altynai Asylmuratova, whose Kitri turned out to be a revelation. This ballet's heroine is often danced as a hard-faced Spanish flirt — all flashing teeth and backbreaking technique — and certainly Asylmuratova can flaunt with the best of them. Her swishing fan crackles with static electricity and she taunts us ruthlessly as she holds her tiny body in long, knowing pauses before exploding into some particularly firecracker step.

But she also makes Kitri irresistibly interesting — a tomboy, a witty slut and a sweethearted woman. At times, we can imagine that she and her lover Basil were climbing trees together only a year before, so wild and free are their spirits.

When Kitri is caught in a high hurtling lift by Basil it looks less like a technical feat than reckless energy. When she drinks and flirts it is with rude, gutsy mischief. At the same time there's an exquisite delicacy in her catlike footwork and a deep reserve of tenderness in her dancing that has every man on stage at Kitri's feet.

Although Zelensky plays Basil — hilariously — as a slightly slow-witted hunk, his dancing is unanswerable. There's a shockingly powerful stretch to his big, long legs that produces steps of magnificent scale and force. And though every move is finished to crisp perfection, he bounces exuberance off everyone around him on stage.

But these performances aren't isolated star turns. The whole company is on champion form. Diana Vishneyva's Kitri (some performances) may be more conventional than Asylmuratova's — less vividly playful with the music and the character — yet her dancing is spectacular. In her early twenties, she is extremely flexible but already has astonishing strength and authority. Her movements are perfectly placed, yet she is visibly, and excitingly, pushing to find her own personal poetry in them.

She also plays Kitri as a young woman sweetly besotted with Basil who, danced by Farouk Ruzimatov, is much more of a blatant flirt than Zelenksy. With his huge dark eyes, flaring nostrils and black curls this Basil thinks he is the catch of the town — and in many respects he is. Ruzimatov can still produce strings of pirouettes to make us drool and a lovely feline jump. But his stamina is much less certain than it used to be and so is his grasp of character.

By the end of the performance he was gazing at Kitri with a romantic agony that made you wonder if he thought he was in Act II of Giselle rather than the wedding celebrations of Don Q. But no one cared.

Tatiana Amosova danced the Queen of the Dryads with a lavish but utterly serene line, Ilya Kuznetsov's Espada was a brilliantly heartless exhibitionist, and Vladimir Ponomarev as the Don stumbled heroically through the ballet looking eerily like an illustration from Cervantes with his hollow fanatic's eyes and long querulous fingers.

Maybe best of all was Viktor Fedotov's conducting, which so deeply honours Minkus's score that instead of the usual choppy sequence of dance numbers we heard music of almost symphonic fluency.

This Don Q has been a wonderful opener to the Kirov season. Not only does it promise so well for the next few weeks but also flamboyantly wipes out the memory of the dispirited company who danced the Nutcracker in Britain last Christmas.



Blatant flirt . . . Farouk Ruzimatov as Basil PHOTOGRAPH LAURIE LEWIS

Ireland 2, England 0

THEATRE
Michael Billington

WE ALL know that English drama is, in Tynan's words, a procession of glittering Irishmen. But Conor McPherson's *The Weir*, at London's Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, is exceptional — a spellbinder that transfixes you like the Ancient Mariner's tale and proves that McPherson can combine the monologue form of This Lime Tree Bower and St Nicholas with sparkling dialogue.

The less said of the plot, the better: you should discover it for yourselves. But the action takes place in a small, rural bar, complete with smoking stove, in the Sligo or Leitrim area on a windy, wintry night. The regulars' tippling is interrupted when Finbar, the local property-owning hotshot, brings in a fugitive from Dublin, Valerie, who has just bought a house in the area. As the men show Valerie black-and-white bar-room photographs of the neighbouring weir and abbey, they start to spin a series of supernatural tales.

Each story, in classic fashion, reveals something about its teller. Jack, the crusty bachelor garage-owner, shows his love of language and a fireside yarn. Finbar displays the insecurity concealed by his cock-of-the-walk strut. And Jim, Jack's quiet helpmate tethered to his aged mummy, unspools his own preoccupation with death.

But McPherson's play is much more than a series of hair-raising ghost stories. It offers, in a little over 90 minutes, an extraordinarily rich picture of Irish rural life, of its superstitions, its solitude, its strong pecking order, its clannish resentment of outsiders — especially the German tourists who arrive like swallows each summer.

McPherson is also saying something about sexuality and the nature of the Irish imagination, about the residual fear of women and about the incapacity of these tale-telling men — with the exception of the sympathetic barman — to accept real-life tragedy as articulated by Valerie.

No praise, in fact, is too high for a play full of the echoing sadness of disappointed lives or for Ian Rickson's production and Rae Smith's design. Exact in every detail, they turn us into pub-voyeurs perched on rickety chairs.

The acting is also perfect. Jim Norton beautifully shows how Jack's flinty spryness conceals a sense of lost happiness. Gerard Horan's blustering Finbar, Kieran Ahern's repressed Jim and Brendan Coyle's taciturn barman have the precise flavour of small-town life. And Julia Ford reveals with great charm and skill the source of Valerie's rapt attentiveness.

Along with that other Irish play, Waiting For Godot, The Weir currently offers the most exciting evening in theatrical London.

I'll give you cock-a-doodle-doo

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

EVERY soap needs a family who are a blot on the landscape. The Grundys, the Dingles, the Corkills. It's an odd thing but, given time, these pulsating pustules always mutate into pets. Look at the Grundys. They are being kind to skylarks.

Then it's time to start again with a new, unimproved injection of low-life.

Coronation Street (Granada), rather stalled in respectability recently, has imported the Battersbys and their foul brood. It says much for Ken Barlow as a teacher that Leanne and Toyah Battersby have passed through his hands without a mark on them. Their ghetto-blaster makes the walls bulge like a blown tin. "Nessun," as Pavarotti remarked, "dorma."

It makes the street quite wistful about the last tenant, Don Brennan. Don's history was a bumpy one. "He's locked up in one of those lunatic asylums after he burned this chap's factory down and then he tried killing his wife by drowning her in a taxi."

But, fair's fair, apart from the thump, thump of his wooden leg and a tendency to gas himself on Christmas Day, you hardly knew Don was there. In fact, he wasn't all there.

Last week Curly, the dampest of men, ignited. Flames issued from his nostrils and smoke from his ears. Breaking through massed ranks of Battersbys, he seized the ghetto-blaster and dashed it to the pavement.

Silence like a poultice came to heal the blows of sound.

Apart, that is, from shrieks, threats ("You'll pay for this!" "I bet it's more than you ever did!") and the soft scrunch as Les Battersby headbutted Curly. Laying to rest with one blow both Curly and the theory that you can't hit a man in glasses.

Which brings me effortlessly to **Neighbours From Hell** (ITV)

It is a popular misconception that the countryside is the place for peace and quiet. "My dear," as Ernest Thesiger said of the Somme, "the noise! And the people!"

When Richard Jobson, who used to be a punk rocker, got up the nose of the local landowner, Sir Neville Bowman Shaw, he found himself living next to a pile of pig shit.

"The sheer physical intensity of the smell just smacked you really hard in the face." The court agreed. Sir Neville was not gruntled. "What the hell next! Good lord, on the Continent the Swiss — they're hygienic — the farmers sleep over their animals for warmth."

You have to watch out for the local nabob. After John and Brenda Laws bought a cottage for the view, their local landowner planted a row of *Cupressus Leylandii* ("the most virulent and notoriously aggressive trees") which blotted out their light. They believe he hopes to buy it back at a bargain price.

Michael Jones, a man so round of face and spectacles he could go on as Mr Pickwick without rehearsal, has founded a Cupressus Leylandii Victim Support Group. They pass the nibbles and exchange horror stories about being buried alive.

I suspect country landowners are disconcerted by the bounce of urban newcomers.

John Ritchings, woken at dawn by a cockerel, has videoed the fowl daily for seven years, calculated the nuisance on a logarithmic scale and is pursuing the council for malfeasance. I'll give you cock-a-doodle-doo.

The most Battersby-like case was Dorothea Graham's. She was being evicted for noise and nuisance at the instigation of her next door neighbour ("He ain't got a heart! He's got a swinging brick!").

The TV crew had contrived to be in the house while Dorothea shouted at the press outside ("Scavengers! Vultures!"). She was not one to go quietly or, indeed, do anything quietly. She has the flowing hair, fluent style and tear-soaked gravel voice of women who beg on the Tube with children in their arms.

"The fings they've said about us! It's All Untrue! 'Oos going to want me next door to them now after the way they've blackened my character? Nobody wants to live next door to the neighbour from hell as such." Large lumps seemed to have fallen off the wall of the room. Possibly something to do with a recent armed raid by the police.

Mark you, the item which hit home hardest was Marjorie, doggedly watching the 24 hours of video surveillance every day in case her neighbours threw dirt in her pond or eggs at her conservatory. Absolutely nothing happened. "It sometimes takes *hours*. I can't take my eyes off viewing in case I miss anything."

Oh, I know, dear, I know.

Bobby dazzler for a prince

Maev Kennedy

THE head of the magnificent new galleries at the British Museum was too modest to steer the Prince of Wales towards his favourite exhibit, a broken bowl labelled in a slightly wobbly hand.

The bowl was excavated in 1959 by an 11-year-old schoolboy, now Dr Timothy Potter, Keeper of Prehistoric and Roman-British Antiquities.

It is among thousands of objects never seen before by the public since the old galleries were bombed in the war, and the department has been camping out ever since.

The Deal Warrior, excavated in Kent with his bronze crown still tipped rakishly over one eye, came out of store to gaze unnervingly on visitors in the new galleries which opened to the public last week. Dr Potter's colleagues were debating whether to show the prince their apparition.

Light from a skylight catches a 4th century silver tray engraved with Apollo, found at Corbridge in Northumberland. When the sun blazes, Apollo and his hand maidens are reflected back up to the roof, apparently blazing in mid-air.

The Deal Warrior, one of thousands of exhibits on show for the first time in the British Museum's new galleries

"It signifies the rise of a new pagan dawn," said Dr Ian Kinnes, probably joking.

The galleries also display humble objects from Roman Britain: an almost complete window pane from a bathhouse in Sussex, an iron frying pan and the only complete Roman spade ever found, made from one piece of ash.

Dr Potter's glee at his new kingdom was irrepressible. "It is all a bit bobby-dazzling, isn't it!"

Letter from Uzbekistan Jennifer Balfour

Up in smoke

IT WAS only a year or so ago that smoking cigarettes here was a bit of a bind. There was not much pleasure to be had in the rough, low quality weed grown haphazardly in the mountains, and the imported Russian varieties were little better. But that has all changed. Thanks to the efforts of BAT and its local subsidiary Uzbat, smoking has taken on a whole new dimension. Uzbekistan has joined the rest of the world.

No one of course has told the people here that the rest of the world is beginning to feel a little squeamish about the habit and that law suits, taxes and tighter controls are forcing companies to scout out remoter hunting grounds.

But let's not be too pessimistic about all this. Thanks to a $300 million investment by BAT in return for a 51 per cent share in Uzbekistan's tobacco monopoly, spanking new factories and fermentation plants are underway, leaf research is gathering momentum, and the future is secure for 60,000 farm workers whose lives are now tied up in the industry. They will be kept on their toes if annual sales targets of 25 million cigarettes by the end of the century are reached and Uzbekistan becomes the hub of cigarette production in Central Asia. There could even be a little more work for doctors too, and no doubt BAT will chip in for a new hospital or two when the time comes. They certainly get full marks for promotional events, fashion shows and sponsorship of deserving projects.

The first we knew of the invasion was from huge "Go For It!" stickers on hotel and restaurant walls, closely followed by startling Lucky Strike targets on bus stops and shop windows. But the brightest idea of all was to give smoking a national identity. Foreign brand names were one thing, but what Uzbekistan really needed was a label of its own. And so the flag-ships were born, in large and king-size, designed in luminescent Coca-Cola colours. At last, here were cigarettes that Uzbeks could really be proud of.

It was around this time that our trolley buses were transformed overnight, handpainted in brilliant reds and whites, into mobile cigarette packets. Too bad the brand name Saraton, chosen to lead Uzbekistan into smoking them was actually Arabic for the [illegible] month of Cancer, but then Arabic speakers, even less those who understand the language, are [illegible] short on the ground here and [illegible] are likely to make the connection.

Uzbat has been careful to obey health warning regulations, at least on its local varieties, although the same cannot be said for its Western brands produced in the country. Some indicate that the "Surgeon General" is more than a little concerned about the habit and that "smoking by pregnant women can result in foetal injury, premature birth and low birth weight", and others that smoke contains carbon monoxide, while the rest are conspicuously empty of any advice. It is [illegible] to imagine whom the English warnings are targeted at, since the language is no more than a [illegible] sought-after twinkle in most people's eyes and the admonitions in their present form are unlikely to reach any of their required destinations.

THE TV advertisements thankfully have no such [illegible] pretensions and promise a girlfriend-filled, happy-ever-after future, full of smoky, fun-[illegible] evenings. Cigarettes will transform boys too, into bright-eyed, square-jawed hunks with gleaming teeth, ever ready to ford any river and climb any mountain for the girl they love.

Girls are still a fairly hard nut to crack, but since independence [illegible] years ago we have seen short [illegible] trousers and mini-skirts, and there is no reason why a cleverly orchestrated campaign to tempt them [illegible] another of the deadly Western [illegible] should not also be a roaring success in the not too distant future.

Suddenly smoking is not an addicts' sport any more — it is a trendy game for everyone to play and Uzbek youth, kept out of the mainstream of Western thought and fashion for 70 years, are the keenest players of all.

And with Uzbat rivals Philip Morris and their Marlboro Man [illegible] riding wild and free over the capitalist prairies, and R J Reynolds/Nabisco bidding for a stake in a game, with 100 million or so Central Asians on the field, there is everything to play for.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

IS BEAUTY really in the eye of the beholder, or can it be measured?

DR STEPHEN Marquardt, a specialist in maxillo-facial surgery, has devised a "scientific formula for ultimate beauty [facial beauty], which he calls the mask" (Tania Unsworth, The Australian Magazine, 1997). For example, the ideal mouth is 1.618 times the width of the nose. Apparently this works for all ethnic groups, though the models chosen do correspond to Western notions of beauty. — *Pauline Lionnet, University of Melbourne, Australia*

WHEN were firemen's poles first introduced into fire stations and who invented them?

ACCORDING to an exhibit in the Fire Museum of New York City, the first poles, made of polished wood, were used in Chicago in 1858. The first brass poles were installed in fire houses in Boston in 1880. — *Wolfgang Floitgraf, Boston, USA*

WHY do some aircraft leave jet trails while others do not?

IAN LEWIS (July 13) attributes vapour trails to water vapour condensing in the cool air over the plane's wings. This does, to some extent, occur and is often visible near take-off and landing. But vapour trails are caused by the combustion of fuel in the plane's engines — fuel and oxygen plus a spark yields carbon dioxide and water (and impurities). If one looks closely, one can in fact see that a four-engined plane will leave four vapour trails which quickly merge into one. I believe that the exhaust of some spy planes has alcohol added to it to prevent the water vapour from condensing into a vapour trail. — *William Hamlin, Richmond, BC, Canada*

IF DOGS can understand certain words like their name and "sit", how many words could they learn? Is it a matter of conditioning? Could certain breeds understand more than others?

IN HER prime, aged around seven years, our collie/labrador cross, Cindy, had a working vocabulary of more than 70 words and phrases. Besides the essential "sit", "stay", "come here" commands, she knew the names of each member of the family and also many friends. She would bring a specifically named toy or object upon request and could open and shut doors. Sadly, at the grand old age of 15, she is now too deaf and blind to take part in such nonsense. — *Julie Revell, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands*

WHAT is the difference between erotica and pornography?

WHEN I was a student in New York, our psychiatry instructor assigned us to go to see an X-rated film. We quickly discovered that pornography was an X-rated film shown at the cost of $3.50 on West 42nd Street and that erotica was the identical film shown at $7.00 on East 59th Street, a tonier neighbourhood. — *Jonathan Newmark, Lakewood, Washington, USA*

WHY are MPs not allowed to call each other liars in the House of Commons, when we all know this is a prerequisite for the job?

THE question answers itself: an MP is not allowed to call another MP a liar because he/she would thereby be telling the truth, thus contravening parliamentary etiquette. — *Laurens Otter, Wellington, Salop*

Any answers?

WHY do multiplication tables end at 12? — *Cyril Howard, Ham, Surrey*

IN PREPARING for our parents' 70th wedding anniversary, my siblings and I would be grateful to learn what follows gold and diamond. If nothing, can anyone suggest a suitable substance? — *Ronald Higgins, Hereford*

WHERE does the phrase "pregnant pause" come from? — *Andrew May, Maidenhead, Berkshire*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

A Country Diary

Virginia Spiers

CEVENNES: We walk west from St Martin on the Ardeche. Cherries are picked, peaches and apricots ripe and fields of blackcurrants harvested by machine. In the hills, away from fertile valleys and overhanging river cliffs, vast tracts of land are virtually uninhabited, wooded with box, juniper and evergreen oak, harbouring wild boar.

Past subsistence farmers have left their mark: tiny stony plots surrounded by massive walls of laboriously picked limestone; gnarled mulberries with sweet, white fruit, their leaves once essential for the defunct silk industry; dilapidated terraces of sweet chestnuts, and, around Pont de Montvert in the upper Tarn, tiers of terraces built from granite boulders, watered by leats and growing wheat until the 1950s. Higher up, near the Tarn's source at Belle Coste, set among flowery pastures with yellow gentians, we hear the distant tinkling sheep bells, evidence that the transhumance flock has arrived.

A few days later we come across a small flock at Col Salldes, grazing under the watchful eyes of a shepherd and his dogs. The main flock passed by a few weeks ago, zigzagging down the graded path among mossy beeches, along crests and ridges of convoluted, sparkling schist above deep, wooded valleys.

Ten years ago we met a flock of some 800, preceded by the continuous jangling of bells, the [illegible] older sheep bedecked with [illegible] red, blue and green wool pompoms. They had already travelled for [illegible] days with six shepherds and [illegible] dogs, en route from the hot [illegible] plain around Montpellier [illegible] the misty greenness of Lozère. [illegible] now follow this traditional way [illegible] sheep are brought up in lorries.

Enjoying the fruits of life's bounty

The Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott talks to **Maya Jaggi** about his sense of settlement in St Lucia

FROM his balcony in St Lucia, Derek Walcott gestures casually towards the luxuriant sunset, beyond flame-orange Flamboyant trees to the cobalt Caribbean sea. "Wouldn't you have difficulty leaving this place?" he pauses before murmuring his own verdict on the island of his birth: "Knockout."

The Bounty, Walcott's first collection of poems since winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992, though tinged with elegiac sadness — for his mother and his fellow poet and friend Joseph Brodsky — is buoyed by a sense of nature's abundance and homecoming.

Now 67, he has spent the past 20 years a "fortunate traveller" between his tiny Antillean island and the wider world, teaching in the United States and staging productions of his 40-odd plays. But with the Nobel prize money, he exchanged the rented cottage on the beach in which he wrote his epic poem Omeros (1990) for a house built for himself and his German-Flemish partner, Sigrid.

"Thanks to what Yeats called the 'bounty of Sweden', I'm settled in an extremely beautiful location, with the daily exultation of waking up by the sea," he says in the resonant tones that make him a captivating reader. "It's not just yours in the sense of owning a house, but the place you come from. A sense of settlement — the roots are in."

In St Lucia, Walcott is revered. The cathedral square is named after him. A man with a gift for friendship, he is prone to telling awful jokes with gusto, whether with peers like the painter Dunstan St Omer and George Odlum, foreign minister in the country's new Labour government, or with Creole-speaking locals in the fragrant bakery at Gros Islet, a fishing village whose wooden shacks are dwarfed by passing tourist cars.

Walcott has spoken of the fisherfolk made heroes of his Antillean Odyssey, Omeros, as "illiterate [but] there to be read". He says: "If I go down to Gros Islet, each face has its own sculpture, but they become something beyond their own natural flesh — iconic, emblematic. There's a sense of their faces being grooved by the daily life we all share."

His own face is similarly weathered, with grey-green eyes and a feature that makes him affectionately known to some St Lucians as "The Moustache". We talk in the studio where he paints watercolours, against the sound of waves that, as he says in The Bounty, "soothe in their unrest".

The title poem is an elegy to his mother Alix, a schoolteacher who died some years ago. Walcott recalls: "I had to go away a lot and leave her; she had to move into a nursing home, which is always agonising. I'd visit her but have to leave repeatedly."

His father, a draftsman, died aged 30, "younger than my son is now". Walcott remembers his mother as "having the actress thing in her". "Her example was phenomenal. Her voice in the house, and my father's pictures and books. I didn't have any other future in my head than to write and draw and paint. I never had any conflict of choice, which is a benediction."

Walcott: 'I'm lucky I didn't go abroad. I much prefer the route I took, to have been here in a difficult but formative time' PHOTO NIGEL PARRY

The elegy cites "my business and duty, the lesson you taught your sons, to write of the light's bounty on familiar things".

Unlike many peers, Walcott left the Caribbean only in the mid-1970s, having narrowly missed the one island scholarship to Oxford ("I had terrible mathematics"). He stayed to paint and work on the craft of poetry, "perfection's sweat".

"I'm lucky I didn't go abroad; I much prefer the route I took, to have been here, writing in a difficult but formative time. To have a sense of working against a sense of futility, but the compensation of a new place as the empire was fading, with new people and a new history you had to reinvest in and redescribe."

The Bounty can be read alongside Walcott's meditative Nobel lecture, The Antilles: Fragments Of Epic Memory. It works against a contemptuous misreading of the Caribbean, as "illegitimate, rootless, mongrelised". He quotes Froude: "No people here in the true sense of the word."

"What's compressed in 300 years of Caribbean experience is enormously epical. We've had our extinct Aboriginals, the Caribs and Arawaks; our holocaust; slavery; indenture; migration. We've had our battles — this island changed hands 13 times between French and British. But that concept of history is based on absurdity: massacre, death."

Walcott insists the Antilles have another kind of history, the sea keeping no records or ruins. "In a big, powerful country with a 'history', the ruins are more important than the people. We don't have that, because we weren't 'great' in that sense. And it's good: it annihilates the idea of history as progress. Here there's only the primal, blessed experience of waking up to the reality of the earth."

Walcott, who has African and European forebears, revels in the potential of the Caribbean's racial, cultural, linguistic mélange, "human variety more exciting than Joyce's Dublin". His insistence on "one literature in several languages" — English, French, Dutch and Spanish — remaps the Caribbean Basin as a cultural goldmine, extending not just to the islands, but from the Gulf of Mexico and Faulkner's Mississippi to García Márquez's Columbia.

We should not be astonished at the fertile foment of Caribbean literature since the 1950s, he thinks, since "there was a lid placed on that voluble genius for centuries". But he rails against "second-rate" governments and their "indifference" towards artists; St Lucia lacks a national museum. "It's not vision that's required, just a kind of thinking: I need to have a loaf of bread and somewhere to hang pictures."

With Brodsky, Walcott says, he "shared a very banal and obscene sense of humour", adding: "I'm blessed, I've had great friends — Seamus Heaney, Joseph, great poets without any affectation or pomposity."

The verse enters Brodsky's voice. "Every elegy is a tribute: the voice becomes a vessel of the lost voice — whether Hardy on Swinburne, or Auden on Yeats."

Some poems in The Bounty foreshadow Walcott's own death. "Lowell once said we're in a time when our friends die daily. As you get older, you open a paper and it's almost a slaughter. So it's a matter of preparation; not of preparing to die — that's pompous, like ordering your own tomb. But one acknowledges gratitude towards what's there. The inheritance is the continuity: that's the bounty. So you're not here, so what? Tomorrow, the same sea will be bright and shiny; somebody'll be saying it's great. There's no weeping, but the benediction of having lived — it means you're going to die. You never think you'll forget the pain of a loss; with love, you want to keep your pain.

"I don't want to forget anyone I've loved, and I can't forget Joseph. But what do you do about the reality of afternoon light on the sea and the absence of a friend? The thing you do is say you, yourself will disappear, but you don't want anyone to stop enjoying that light: you can't leave that legacy to your children or those you love. So the book has the confrontation and acceptance and bafflement of death. It's elegiac, but I don't think it's tragic."

Curiously for a writer whose sense of place is so vivid, Walcott was commended by Brodsky as a "poet of the English language", as though to call him a "Caribbean poet" were to diminish his art.

Walcott explains: "I'm not in the line of inheritance of what should come out of where. The centre of authority always remains. When you're praised, it's like applauding Dr Johnson's dog or preacher. But it's been a phase of every literature — Commonwealth, post colonial — where writers are gradually elevated to prefects in the school, the club." So is he now a full member of the club? "You mean that place in London — the Groucho?" he erupts into scornful laughter. "Yeah, but I'd rather buy bread in Gros Islet."

Though "settled" on his paradise island, Walcott will keep wrenching himself away — to teach in Boston, where last year he was threatened with a sexual harassment suit by a former drama student. Boston university investigated the claims and backed the professor. The case was settled out of court.

He is also preparing for the opening of a Broadway musical he is working on with Paul Simon. The Cape Man, based on a real bank robbery, balances Puerto Rican, Nuyorican and New York cultures.

On the beach, a young black Londoner comes to shake his hand, saying: "You mean as much to me as Nelson Mandela." Walcott, who covers his embarrassment by quipping "he'll pick up his money later", is clearly touched.

The Bounty is also the name of St Lucia's premium rum. Walcott (who has given up alcohol and cigarettes) laughingly denies the allusion. But it is tempting to see the Nobel laureate as sharing a private joke with his fellow islanders, far from the portals of London's Groucho club.

The Bounty is published by Faber & Faber at £7.99

Bubble and squeak

Tim Radford

Volcanoes: Crucibles of Change
by Richard V Fisher, Grant Heiken and Jeffrey B Hulen
Princeton University Press 317pp £25

SAN GENNARO, alias St Januarius, interceded with God to save Naples from Mt Vesuvius in 685, 1631 and 1707. In 1881, Princess Ruth Keelikoani stopped a lava flow from Mauna Loa in Hawaii by chanting incantations, scattering red silk scarves and pouring a libation of brandy on the flames.

You can climb a volcano but can you ever get on top of one? Aircraft in the stratosphere have been damaged or put at risk at least 80 times in recent decades. Every minute, 18,000 cubic metres of air pass through each engine of a Boeing 747 at cruising altitudes. If there are 250 milligrams of volcanic ash in each metre of air, then each engine is chewing up 4.5 kilograms of ash every minute. This is quite enough to shut an engine down. So far, nobody has died.

A violent eruption throws ash 30 miles high. Once in the stratosphere it stays there for ages. Toba in Sumatra 74,000 years ago coughed 2,800 cubic kilometres of ash into the air, probably altering the planet's climate. Notoriously, Mt Tambora in 1815 killed 92,000 and then triggered the "year without a summer" of 1816: a time of widespread harvest failure, famine, cholera and Gothic horror (it was in this year that, holed up in a bleak Europe with Byron, Mary Shelley composed Frankenstein).

Volcanoes have showered islands and continental margins with basalt, scoria, pumice and tuff, adding layer after layer of plant nutrients to build some of the richest soils.

Volcanoes have their good points. The Romans built lasting aqueducts and monuments by mixing their concrete with volcanic ash. Bentonite is a clay formed from volcanic ash. It is used as a filler for bread, certain kinds of ice cream, gum and cat litter. Volcanoes produce geothermal energy in New Zealand and Italy, and the geyser spectaculars of Iceland and Yellowstone National Park. The kimberlite funnels of the South African diamond mines are ancient volcanic vents: diamonds are believed to be ancient ejecta.

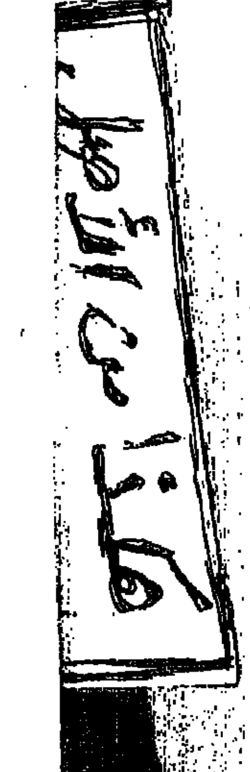
But beware of the stuff that foams from the crater's lip: it is not always the moving tongue of red hot treacle, crusted with brittle stuff, that looks so good in a movie. When Mt St Helens blew in 1980 a hot black cloud — between 100C and 300C, some estimated — raced across forest and farmland at more than 80mph; people were burned, buried, mummified and asphyxiated. Thirty-five died, 22 were never found.

In 1985 in Colombia, mud, sand, gravel and boulders tore down a hillside after an eruption of Nevado del Ruiz, killing 25,000. At Lake Nyos in Cameroon a crater lake suddenly foamed, to spill carbon dioxide like a river of smoke silently down the hillside. Around 1,700 died, and 3,000 cattle. There were no vultures, and no flies on the carcasses. They had died of asphyxiation.

Popacatépetl in Mexico is on the tourist trail: earlier this month it put on a show. (This endearing book even has an appendix for the volcanologically inclined traveller: "Do not attempt to cross an active flow," it says.)

In Martinique, in 1902, a mountainside converted itself in seconds into a hot, dense hurricane of superheated rock. It moved faster than any wind-driven hurricane, and killed 29,000 people in St Pierre.

Martinique is on the same island arc, and has the same geology, as Montserrat, where the Soufrière Hills volcano last month claimed a number of lives, and could suddenly take many more. Pompeii and Herculaneum are history lessons, but are they heeded? How many would die if Vesuvius got nasty again, as it almost certainly will? Naples will need San Gennaro again, although a decent evacuation plan would help.



A peculiar brilliance

Veronica Horwell

Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism
by Angela Carter
Chatto & Windus 642pp £25

WHY IS there no Booker prize for a commissioning editor? Not for whoever set up this book — "Let us collect all possible pieces of a now sacred late author" — not quite heroic. (But thanks to them anyway, because lots in here I haven't even got on scrutty, old fourth-copy Xeroxes with the last page missing.)

No, the award should go to the brave, mad bastard at the magazine New Society around 30 years ago who seems to have said to la Carter when she was only a very peculiar novel or two into her working life: "Half of what you write is weird and the other half will get up people's noses. *I like it.* You want to file a few thousand words about giant wooden pricks at a Japanese fertility festival? You want to expose D H Lawrence as a literary drag queen *manqué* whose closet is full of Liberty frocks? *I'll publish it.*"

Not only a brave, mad bastard, of course, but a bloody prescient BMB. Because it doesn't read wild now. Although none of it is orthodoxy even yet. Especially not the tone of Carter's voice, with the latest in semiotics made comprehensibly conversational and plonked down beside phrases that must have been plucked out of the speech of her ferocious south Yorkshire gran. No current ego-journos would deflate themselves as Carter did — she never tried to project personal desirability in print, unless you count her shameless flaunting of brains.

And her subjects hardly had a close target grouping, either. Lipstick red as wound. The class position of Paddington Bear. Scarlett O'Hara in Gone With The Wind as a prototype Maggie Thatcher.

Perhaps because Carter only wrote for the press when she wanted to, and then mostly on her own choice of subjects, this collection has that frothed-up, invented-contentious feel of most feature-writing. It's all matter-of-fact, especially the surrealism. And diagnostic: even prognostic — 20 years before broadcasting was taken over by a putsch of chefs she was on to the Elizabeth Davidisation process: "We are all cooks now," she sniffed, never a woman to believe the Holy Grail was hidden in a fresh loaf of foccacio.

How she foresaw what she didn't live to see. I had to scan the dates of most of these pieces three times before I registered they were — *no, the verb is had to be, she's gone, dammit* — 1967 or 1977 not 1997.

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £21 contact CultureShop


Not divided . . . Radclyffe Hall (right) with Lady Una Troubridge

Well of constant fun

Natasha Walter

Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John
by Sally Cline
John Murray 434pp £25

RADCLYFFE HALL is remembered for one thing and one thing only; the publication of The Well Of Loneliness, "the one lesbian novel everyone has heard of". The book's 1928 trial for obscenity, in which Virginia Woolf, E M Forster and Vera Brittain were prepared to testify on Hall's behalf (though not to the novel's literary merit) made this elegant, butch lesbian an infamous figure then and something of a heroine now.

The Well Of Loneliness is a lugubrious, heavy-handed novel, but it still has the power to move you almost to tears over its heroine's tragic situation. It may not be much of a literary achievement, but it was a personal achievement for Hall, who was rightly proud of her courage in creating one of the first unapologetic lesbian romances. And its trial marked one of those odd cultural turning points; The Well was banned, but it was also a best-seller, and from the moment of its publication lesbians started to become more visible in Britain. Still, this book, pilloried in the courts for being full of "filthy sin" and "acts of the most horrible, unnatural and disgusting obscenity", contains just one line of lesbian sex, perhaps the coyest ever written: ". . . and that night they were not divided".

Until reading this biography by Sally Cline, I had always assumed The Well Of Loneliness was pretty much an autobiographical work. Certainly, it contains autobiographical elements. Stephen Gordon, Hall's heroine, affects the same dress as Hall herself: the silk neckties and tailored jackets. She was, similarly, a prolific writer who saw her work as a way of proving herself against an unsympathetic world. Like her heroine, Hall gave herself a man's name, John, and like her heroine she acted out a traditionally masculine, overbearing role in her relationships with other women. But on one vital count the book and the life pull apart. Far from falling into a well of loneliness, Hall found her lesbianism a fount of constant fun.

So unlike poor Stephen Gordon, who had no friends except some miserable outcasts in Paris, Radclyffe Hall moved in a crowded social circle. Colette, Natalie Barney, Rebecca West, Violet Gordon Woodhouse, as well as dozens of other less well-known women admired her work and accepted her sexuality. And while Stephen Gordon gave up her only real lover, Hall was never single, and often caught in crazy triangles. The last few years of her life were packed with passion; she had been living happily with Lady Una Troubridge for 18 years when she fell in love with a young Russian woman, Eugenia Souline, and forced them into an uneasy *ménage à trois*.

APART from this love affair, which is documented in a handful of surviving letters, Hall's life is viewed mainly from a distance. She left behind no diaries, few notebooks, and only occasional letters. Sally Cline has certainly gone the distance in her research; she has discovered scraps of fiction and autobiography that have never been published, but she is still constantly thrown back on others' work in documenting Hall's life. And she is an uninspiring biographer, fond of clouding the detail with rhetoric. "A literary study of a writer who was an invert will both invite questions of definition and identity as well as throwing up the issue of the extent to which sexuality is the product of social forces," she tells us grandly.

Given the absence of personal writing and the undeniable fact that Hall is not a great writer, perhaps this book is best read as social history than as literary biography. The description of the trial of The Well Of Loneliness is perfect British farce, right down to the incompetent defence barrister who scuppers the case, and the author in a sombrero shouting "Shame" from her seat.

Myth breaker

Keith Thomas

On History
by Eric Hobsbawm
Weidenfeld 305pp £20

ERIC HOBSBAWM is 80 this year. He is probably the best-known living British historian, certainly the one whose work has been translated into the most languages. He brings to his historical writing some outstanding gifts: a probing intelligence, exceptional analytic power, great linguistic facility and an extremely wide range of knowledge. Born in Alexandria, brought up in Vienna and Berlin, and educated at Cambridge in the late 1930s, he is a cosmopolitan of broad culture and, that relatively unusual thing among British historians, an intellectual.

Thus equipped, Hobsbawm has illuminated an astonishing range of topics and themes. He is not a delver in the archives, and his books are feats of synthesis and analysis, rather than works of primary research. But he has a rare capacity to devise or disseminate new concepts which leave an enduring mark: "social banditry", for example, or "the invention of tradition". Professional historians admire him for his magisterial essays on labour history and for his penetrating studies of social and political topics: Primitive Rebels, Bandits, Revolutionaries, and Nations And Nationalism.

To the reading public, he is better known for his four volumes on the history of European capitalism from the late 18th to the 20th century: The Age Of Revolution, The Age Of Capital, The Age Of Empire and Age Of Extremes. Every page of this absorbing series reveals its author to be himself a supreme exemplar of that bourgeois culture which he so memorably dissects.

All his books are written with laconic elegance, in a cool, ironic, dispassionate tone. They are broad in their comparative perspective and incisively argued. In an age of narrow specialists, Eric Hobsbawm remains the supreme generalist. There are those who regret his relentless concentration on large impersonal forces and his somewhat schematic view of the past. But for sheer intelligence, he has no superior in the historical profession: no great praise perhaps, for, as he remarks in one of his essays, history has not, over the past century or two, been a discipline which has required great intellectual powers.

His new collection is a mixture of reprinted pieces and previously unpublished addresses. There are three main themes: the use and abuse of history; modern trends in historical writing; and the author's views on what history ought to be about.

The Hobsbawm who emerges from these essays is above all a man of the Enlightenment, a believer in the capacity of human reason and a searcher for the laws of social evolution which will help us to understand and ameliorate the condition of mankind. He has no sympathy with post modernist attempts to obliterate the distinction between fact and fiction. He accepts that a totally "objective" view of the past is unobtainable, for every historian sees it from a distinctive perspective. But facts cannot be invented and statements about history must rest on verifiable evidence. Unfortunately, most history has been written for ideological purposes: to buttress the authority of rulers or to provide a convenient myth for nationalism and [illegible] cial movements. As Ernest [illegible] said, "Getting history wrong [illegible] essential factor in the forming [illegible] nation. The historian's duty is [illegible] construct these myths by [illegible] aside the fabrications and [illegible] nisms; and it is in the modern [illegible] versity that such a critical [illegible] can be most easily practised."

These are unexceptionable propositions, of a kind which [illegible] conservative historian like the [illegible] Sir Geoffrey Elton would [illegible] warmly endorsed. What [illegible] guishes Hobsbawm from [illegible] his contemporaries is his [illegible] continuing belief that the key [illegible] to history remains the model [illegible] of Karl Marx.

In these essays he takes it [illegible] iomatic that changes in the [illegible] production are the essential [illegible] of historical development. The [illegible] tory of humanity is the story [illegible] growing control over nature [illegible] probably not more intelligent [illegible] our Neolithic ancestors, but [illegible] intervening years society has [illegible] transformed. For Hobsbawm [illegible] attraction of Marxism is that [illegible] vides a model of long-term [illegible] cal transformations [illegible] convincing answer to what [illegible] "the central question of how [illegible] fit together". It also sets limits [illegible] scope of human action. [illegible] in no way rules out human [illegible] individuality and purpose [illegible] iour. But with Marx he is [illegible] that the prevailing mode of [illegible] tion constricts human possi[illegible]

THE COLLAPSE of the S[illegible] Union is often said [illegible] discredited the Marx[illegible] terpretation of history. This [illegible] fair, for the Soviet catastrophe [illegible] largely irrelevant to a theory [illegible] for all its defects, has proved [illegible] portant stimulus to [illegible] thought. What the events of [illegible] did discredit was Soviet [illegible] nism. Hobsbawm's works [illegible] never regarded as orthodox [illegible] to be translated into Russian [illegible] the Soviet period. But he [illegible] having devoted most of his [illegible] "cause which has plainly fail[illegible] communism initiated by the [illegible] ber Revolution"; and his sy[illegible] for the Soviet experiment, [illegible] its horrors, remains unconce[illegible] one of his essays he vigorous[illegible] fends partisanship as an [illegible] historical understanding; and [illegible] passage of remarkable [illegible] ity, he expresses the hope [illegible] experience of defeat will [illegible] a better historian.

Sceptics who think of Eric [illegible] bawm as a brilliant man [illegible] trapped in a Marxist [illegible] should read this absorbing [illegible] tion of essays. They will be [illegible] by its freshness. The book [illegible] interest for the light it throws [illegible] of the most powerful minds [illegible] time. It should be read by [illegible] who cares how history [illegible] written and why it matters.

If you would like to order this [illegible] at the special price of £16.[illegible] contact CultureShop

Jewish women are led away to an almost certain death: could the Allies have saved them? PHOTO: AKG

Liberation fallacy unravelled

Norman Stone

The Myth of Rescue
by William D Rubinstein
Routledge 267pp £18.99

WILLIAM RUBINSTEIN is a brave man. There was an orthodoxy about British decline, which stated that the problem was the English gentleman. One generation would make money the hard way: the next would spend it on fancy ways — Eton, horses, peasants. Rubinstein took on this orthodoxy and wrote one of those essay-books on English social history that sticks in the brain — he had a wonderful eye for quotations from Dickens which put him into the Orwell class.

With this book, he has taken on an orthodoxy of a quite different kind. Over the past 30 years, there has been an effort to blame almost anyone for the Holocaust except Hitler. There are, moreover, shelf-loads of books demonstrating that the Western Allies could have saved Jews from the Nazis. Jews should have been allowed to emigrate in far greater numbers before and during the war; the railway-lines to Auschwitz, and the camp itself, should have been bombed; a ransom should have been paid.

The overall result, as Rubinstein says, is that Roosevelt — for all his many Jewish appointments — appears, like Churchill, as a sort of collaborator in Hitler's programme to exterminate the Jews. All of this has not really been challenged. There undoubtedly is room for a book on the Holocaust that would take into account the various alterations in the picture of things that emerged in 1945. I hope that the Yd Vashem institute in Israel will produce such a book. For the rest of us, common sense and decency make it extremely difficult to offend elderly survivors by suggesting that the picture needs to be amended.

There have been suggestions that "Holocaust-denial" should be made a crime. The problem is that such a law might be extended to cover William Rubinstein's book, which is one of not very many on the subject that is genuinely needed. He has done an enormous amount of work, and an enormous amount of thinking. He writes with a vigour that you do not always find among historians: passion will out.

If you look at the overall effort of the Western world to let Jews escape from Nazi Germany, you will find that the record is unparallelledly good, he says. About three-quarters of the German and Austrian Jews managed to get out before the war began. But for exiled Russians after 1919, or for other persecuted groups, life had been far, far more difficult: you could only settle in Great Britain, for instance, if you had substantial means. Besides, until 1938, most German Jews imagined that it would all "blow over". Once the nature of Nazi persecution became plain, with Kristallnacht in November 1938, the British, in particular, opened their doors, and there was a long list of people, not Jewish, who did their best to help.

Once the war began, Hitler's policy was not to encourage emigration, but to cram Jews into ghettos, and then, after mid-summer 1941, to murder them or work them to death. Hitler was adamant about this, too; even in February 1945 he was furious when Himmler tried to release a few thousand Jews in return for some hard currency. There just was no possibility of ransom, and in any case the Allies, of course, allowed any Jews who did get out to settle — in Cyprus if not (to avoid offending Arabs) in Palestine. There were some horrible incidents, like the stranding of Jews in the Black Sea until their ship was sunk by a submarine, probably Soviet, because the British would only let the children off. But these incidents should not obscure the overall picture, which was of the Allies doing what they could.

The main thing that they could do was of course to win the war and liberate the camps. Otherwise, they could put on pressure through neutrals. Proposals to bomb the camps were made, and, as Rubinstein snortingly says, television documentaries are made to the effect that ill-will alone prevented these from coming to fruition. In any case, Jewish organisations did not want to have their own people killed by a bombing-raid, even if it was technically feasible.

And so the whole business went on. In the sixties, "revisionism" about the origins of the cold war became fashionable, and that attitude, of blaming London and Washington for wartime and post-war events, became a stock response. Rubinstein, laying about him with a keen eye for vulnerable spots, has written a very good book, which, in these respects, should do some good.

Cold comforts in the country

Alex Clark

The Country Life
by Rachel Cusk
Picador 342pp £15.99

IN HER third novel, Rachel Cusk abandons the urban landscapes of Saving Agnes and The Temporary and exiles herself in the unfamiliar but no less threatening territory of the countryside. And in doing so, she comes up with a clever, funny and original setting in which to explore her chosen themes of identity, self-sufficiency and the precarious nature of human relationships.

In London, Stella Benson sits down to write a series of short letters to her parents, her employer and an unspecified man, Edward. She tells them that she is leaving and does not expect to return. Don't bother looking for me, she demands: "I have been unhappy for a long time. While I don't exactly blame you for this I still think it would be better for me if we didn't see each other any more."

She takes up a position of au pair to the wheelchair-bound son of a wealthy farming family, the Maddens. Her motivation, although given virtually no context, is clear: she seeks to free herself from encumbrances and to begin afresh. She is launched on a project of self-liberation through a new and different form of enslavement, as if too much freedom has, in the past, been her downfall.

This magnificent piece of self-delusion takes place in a comic style over which Cusk exercises masterly control. Stella values above all else her talent for practical thinking and decisive action. When she considers the Maddens' demands for an employee with an "aptitude for the country life", she notes that she in fact possesses the aptitude for any kind of life, an intelligent and pragmatic adaptability which will overcome all obstacles. Instead, she finds herself in a reverse Cold Comfort Farm, in which she expects little, gets less, and is unequal to almost every demand made on her.

Within a matter of days, she is all but totally compromised: she has sustained severe sunburn, fallen out with the fantastically manic mistress of the house, inadvertently become a thief and drunk herself into a stupor. Meanwhile the house and its occupants live out their tangled, impenetrable lives against a backdrop of hinted-at incest and rural violence.

A fable of control and its absence, The Country Life succeeds as comedy precisely because of the discord between Stella's impeccable narrative voice and the chaos of her experiences. Acutely observed, both witty and humorous, Cusk's rural ride is a fine entertainment, and one which packs a darker and subtler punch than it at first promises.

Death in Edinburgh

Alan Taylor

Body Politic
by Paul Johnston
Hodder & Stoughton 320pp £16.99

SCOTLAND'S capital city in the year 2020 does not look as appealing as devolutionists would have us believe. Less than a quarter of a century hence, and with the rest of the UK in a state of anarchy, Auld Reekie maintains a civilised front through a junta that keeps tabs on everyone, insists that the masses have a regular dose of sex and pretends that crime is extinct.

Ever dour, the Reykjavik of the South is now a tourist Valhalla where even the sex clubs have entered the spirit of the times, with Mary Queen of Scots performing fellatio on Rizzio. John Knox must be birling in his grave.

A killer is on the loose and the City Guardians are flummoxed. Their solution is to call in Quintilian Dalrymple, aged 36, whose CV as a sleuth includes the grisly case of the infamous Ear, Nose and Throat Man.

Quint was born in 1984, which auspicious date may explain why he is a blues-loving, bicycling liberal. It cannot, however, excuse his wicked way with similes. "She was wearing red stockings and high heels that made her legs as striking as a smiling face in a philosophy seminar," he muses of his femme fatale, the foul-mouthed Katharine K. Round one to Philip Marlowe. Ably assisted by his bovine sidekick, Davie, Quint is soon blundering through one murder after another while simultaneously searching for Katharine's missing brother.

It is an intricate web, but debut novelist Johnston is a Fawkes among plotters and the pace rarely stutters. He knows Edinburgh and its literary antecedents intimately. Body Politic, doubtless for sound commercial reasons, cleverly pastiches those of Iain Banks's more effulgent effusions, particularly Complicity.

But Paul Johnston's coup is in setting a crime novel in the future when the vogue of late has been to locate them in the past. It opens up enormous possibilities and a few pitfalls. Johnston's Edinburgh is one in which the festival has grown to year-round proportions. This seems all too likely. It currently has more festivals than the Catholic Church. In Body Politic, however, the festivals are strictly for the tourists. Crime turns them on as long as it is dressed up as history. When it is real, they simply stop coming and go elsewhere. That is what the City Guardians fear above all else.

Johnston's point is pertinent and justifiable. Quint's career looks set to blossom, though I do hope he stops treating Davie as if he were the poor man's Dr Watson.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

The Sandman: the Wake, by Neil Gaiman, ill Michael Zulli, Jon J Muth and Charles Vess (Titan, £12.99)

IT ALL depends on your acceptance of the comic strip and the autonomous mythology as vehicles of expression, but this last volume of "Sandman" stories is a fitting conclusion to Gaiman's magnum opus about Morpheus, the Lord of Dreams. Not worth turning to unless you know something of what's gone before, and are forgiving of the cod archaism and pumped-up significance that comes with the territory, but it is touching, original, and intelligent, consistent with itself; and the artwork is the best of the entire series.

Anatomy of Restlessness, by Bruce Chatwin, ed Jan Borm & Matthew Graves (Picador, £6.99)

A COLLECTION of short pieces, stories, letters, sketches, reviews; there's nothing scrappy or piecemeal about the book, for Chatwin, as revealed by this selection, although you probably knew this already, was a man driven by the need to explore. "The man who sits quietly in a shuttered room", he writes, "is likely to be mad, tortured by hallucinations and introspection." Even I, who do not even like going out to get the milk, find myself driven to go out and experience something of the world's danger and strangeness after reading this book.

Gospel Truth, by Russell Shorto (Hodder & Stoughton, £12.99)

WELL, how much of the Bible was made up? Was Jesus's mother a virgin? Did he really feed the 5,000? Why is Paul Johnson's idea of Jesus very similar to Paul Johnson, and Cliff Richard's very similar to Cliff Richard? The historical Jesus movement tries to answer these questions, apart from the last one, for all the hopeless rationalists among us and on the whole they make a good fist of it. We are, by the way, talking about reasonably sane people and not those A-Descendant-of-Jesus-Runs-The-Masons conspiracy wackos. Full of facts. The Temple of Jerusalem could contain 20 football pitches. Well I never.

Psychedelia Britannica: Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain, ed Antonio Melechi (Turnaround, £9.99)

NICE to see a book acknowledging that we invented psychedelia, but too many of the contributions here seem to have been written under its direct, chemical influence. Fraser Clark's essay is so loony he makes Terence McKenna sound like Matthew Arnold. The best piece is by Melechi himself (on LSD evangelist and conman Michael Hollingshead) and there are some old ramblings by Alexander Trocchi for those who like, or, ahem, "dig" such things. Good old-fashioned fun.

Sun, sea, sand – and sex

Mark Cocker

THE stretch of Norfolk coastline at Burnham Overy couldn't have looked more tempting. The beach was bathed in sunshine and the sands receded to a distant tide-edge in a series of undulations, each dip filled by shallows where holidaying children were having the time of their lives. Yet way out at the shoreline it was deserted and the expanse was reduced to just two simple elements — the rippling sand flats and the ringing blue waters of the North Sea.

It was on these flats that terns had congregated to enact their courtship rituals, and everywhere the same performance unfolded. Males, with freshly caught sand-eels drooping from their bills, made oblique approaches towards watchful partners. Both shook their heads constantly as the male circled in a long, stiff-jointed manoeuvre, until the female either flew off unimpressed or accepted his advance and crouched forward. Her back would then arch and her tail lift upwards, while he stood erect, his breast thrust out, neck craned and wings partially opened. When he closed finally upon her, the wings began to beat more vigorously, his obvious physical excitement intensifying as he mounted, while she raised her beak skywards for the compensatory morsel of fish.

The behaviour couldn't have looked more in keeping with Burnham Overy's potent blend of sun, sea and sand. But in fact their sexual antics were not as apt as they seemed. By this time in the summer the birds should already be parents, hurrying back and forth with food for ever-hungry chicks. The fact that the rituals of May were being re-enacted in July was an indication that they had no offspring and were attempting to re-nest. And at this late date in the season it's highly unlikely they'll rear any young at all.

Being one of the smallest seabirds in the world, terns appear inherently vulnerable. They breed on shingle beaches close to the tide-edge and regularly find their nests flooded by high tides. They also have few defences against predators. Eggs and young fall victim to every conceivable creature. At this same tern colony I've seen crows locate eggs with laser-like precision, and squirrels, about a kilometre from the nearest tree, combing the shingle for chicks. Some tern colonies can be wiped out by an animal no more fearsome than Mrs Tiggywinkle, while another unlikely threat comes from the children who were playing further up the beach, since the holidaymakers inadvertently trample eggs or disturb the sitting adults.

This year, however, none of these factors was at work. The problem was two weeks of almost continuous summer rain and storms — exceptional conditions that have had a devastating impact on seabirds all along Britain's east coast. Elsewhere in Norfolk, at Blakeney Point, one of the largest terneries in the country was a scene of carnage, the beach strewn with thousands of dead chicks. At Bemoton Cliffs in Yorkshire approximately 100,000 immature kittiwakes were swept from the rock faces, while further north in the Farne Islands off Northumberland, more than 20,000 young puffins drowned in their nest burrows.

Such disasters wreak temporary havoc and can cause the loss of an entire generation of wild animals. But seabirds, however vulnerable to their natural element they may seem, are actually highly resilient to unexpected fluctuations. Their lives are relatively long (20-30 years for many species) and even terns, each no heavier than a couple of large strawberries, can readily withstand the outrageous fortunes of an angry North Sea.

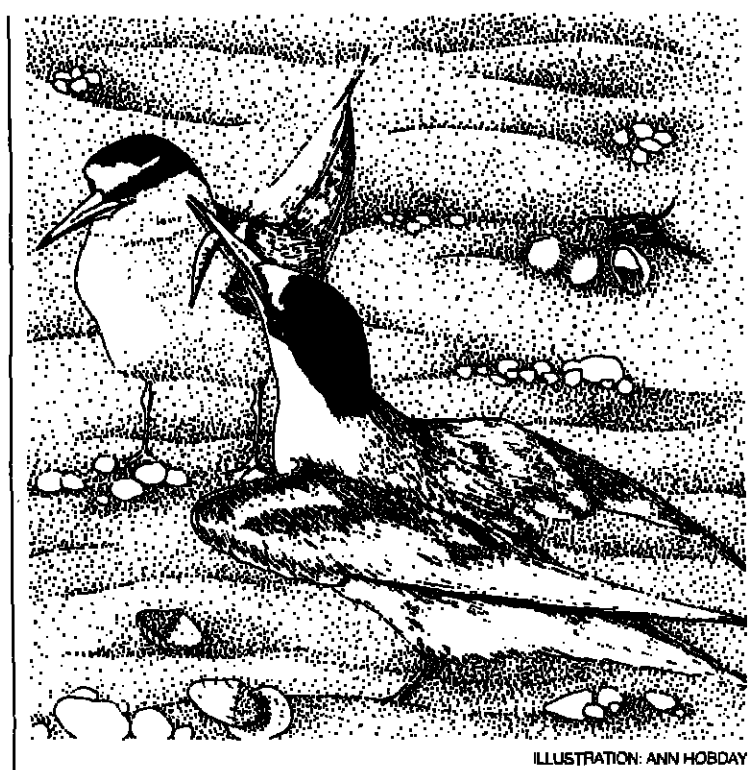


ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Chess Leonard Barden

IT'S not easy to become a grandmaster in a hurry, and last month's tournament at the Drury Lane Moat House Hotel in London launched what could be a summer-long saga for Jonathan Parker, Cambridge university's best player. Earlier this year, Parker, aged 21, scored the first of three required GM results with an impressive performance for Midland Monarchs in the 4NCL league.

His latest Fide rating of 2,505 is at GM standard, and, in normal conditions, he would expect to secure his title in a year or so. But the outlook for UK professionals is bleak, and Parker, an economics student, has opted for a City career. With just three months to complete the GM requirements before starting his new job, he has been seen studying a list of Continental opens and a map.

Frustratingly for Parker, he got to within one point of the GM score at Drury Lane but then had the black pieces in the final round against the leader John Emms.

Emms v Parker

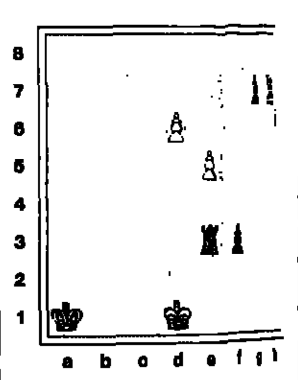
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4 Bb7 Given this game's special conditions, Black's opening is too routine. Even if he didn't want to play a sharp Sicilian 1 . . . c5, he should still avoid the well-trodden main line Ruy Lopez. White's 8 a4 is unusual (8 c3) so Black might try 8 . . . b4 9 d3 Na5 10 Ba2 b3!? 11 cxb3 c5 and Nc6.

9 c3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Nd7 12 Nbd2 0-0 13 Nf1 c4 14 axb5 axb5 15 Ng3 g6 16 Bh6 Re8 17 Qd2 Qc7 18 Rad1 Nb6 Black is trying to entice d4-d5 blocking the centre while White must watch for . . . d6-d5 opening up the centre. Meanwhile the dark squares around Black's king are weak, so White exchanges the defensive bishop.

19 Bg5 Nb3 20 Qe2 Ba6 21 Bxe7 Qxe7 22 Qe3 Reb8 23 Nd2 Na5 24 Ra1 cxd4 25 cxd4 Nc6 26 Rac1 b4 White has vacillated in the last few moves, so 26 . . . Bc8! looks better, to guard the [illegible] side, threaten Ra2, and meet 27 [illegible] by Nb4.

27 Bb1 Na5 28 e5 [illegible] Nh5! Black's army has [illegible] broke on the Q-side, so White [illegible] K-side tactics. If gxh5? 30 [illegible] quickly. **Nd7 30 Nf4 [illegible] Nh5 Nd7 32 Nf4 Bb7 33 [illegible] Ra6 34 h4** Following the [illegible] that the best attacks are in the [illegible] minutes before the time control [illegible] **35 Re3 Ne6 36 Nxe6 [illegible] Rce1 Kh8 38 Qf4** Rc8 39 [illegible] At last a Q-side break, but White [illegible] ready. **40 bxc3** bxc3 41 [illegible] **Rb6?** A blunder under pressure [illegible] though Black's game is [illegible] Rec6 or Kg7 should be tried [illegible] **Qh6! Resigns** Why? The [illegible] point is Qf8 (else 43 Ng5) 43 [illegible] Rxf8 44 Rxc3 when White is [illegible] pawn up but Black's pawns [illegible] mobile on the same [illegible] squares as his bishop. It's [illegible] hopeless, so I don't blame Parker [illegible] mentally switching on to his [illegible] GM tournament.

No 2482



Though White (to play) [illegible] contend with f2 and Re1+, [illegible] draw easily by 1 Rxg7 f2 2 Rf7[illegible] if Re1+? 3 Kd2 f1Q 4 Rxf1 Rxf1 [illegible] the pawns defeat the rook. Take a bow if you spotted this. Now try [illegible] real puzzle from the diagram: White to move and win.

No 2481: 1 Ne6+ Kf7? ([illegible] Qxg8+ holds out longer) 2 [illegible] Kxe6 3 Qf5 mate.

Quick crossword no. 376

Across

1 Too (4)
3 Pig-headed (8)
9 Sum paid for insurance — a bonus (7)
10 Irrigate (5)
11 Confess (5)
12 Skilful (6)
14 Pedagogue (13)
17 Oriental market (6)
19 Surveyor's measure — a string! (5)
22 Hurry (5)
23 Sudden inclination to act (7)
24 Traveller on foot (8)
25 Prison — commotion (4)

Down

1 Hand-clapping (8)
2 Vapour from boiling water (5)
4 Repeatedly (4,5,4)
5 Shady retreat (5)
6 Large, flightless bird (7)
7 Standard (4)
8 Small restaurant (6)
13 Magnificence (8)
15 Rumour (7)
16 Believe (6)
18 Scene of conflict (5)
20 Apportion (5)
21 Point out — display (4)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THE British Ladies' team won the European Championships in Italy last month for the first time since 1981. For Nicola Smith, Pat Davies and Sandra Landy, this was their fourth European title. For Michele Handley, Liz McGowan and Heather Dhondy it represented their first gold medals at this level, though McGowan and Dhondy are already world champions, having won the World Mixed Teams title at the Rhodes Olympiad last year.

The British women had to fight off a determined challenge from a French team containing no fewer than four players making their international debuts — the strength in depth of bridge in France is second only to that in the United States — but the British maintained an almost incredibly high standard of performance. They lost only three of their 23 matches, and they lost none of them by a margin of more than 12 IMPs, a display of consistency without parallel in the history of the game.

The same boards were played in the Open series as in the Ladies, and on the following deal Dhondy had the satisfaction of making a slam in which her counterpart in the Open team had failed. See if you can match her performance and make six hearts on the North-South hands below.

North
♠ 6 3
♥ A J 9
♦ A 4
♣ A Q J 9 7 3

West
♠ 10 8 7
♥ 4
♦ 10 8 6 3 2
♣ K 8 4 2

East
♠ J 9 5 2
♥ 10 8 5 2
♦ K 9 7
♣ 10 5

South
♠ A K Q 4
♥ K Q 7 6 3
♦ Q J 5
♣ 6

This had been the bidding:

South	West	North	East
		1♣	Pass
1♥	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠	Pass	5♦	Pass
6♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

and West led the eight of clubs, a creative effort designed to fool Dhondy into placing East with the king.

How would you have play[ed it]? (Taking the club finesse is [illegible] ing, of course — you don't need [illegible] even though it works!) Dhondy won the club lead with dummy's ace, and cashed the ace and king of spades. East followed with the [illegible] then the two, showing an even number of cards in her system. Dhondy ruffed a spade with the [illegible] hearts, then cashed the ace [illegible] jack of trumps.

West showed out on the second round of hearts, but Dhondy [illegible] confident that, since East had [illegible] long spade, she could safely [illegible] ace and another diamond. [illegible] West won with the king, she [illegible] not give East a spade ruff. In fact [illegible] was East who won the second diamond, but Dhondy could ruff [illegible] club return, draw trumps and [illegible] her contract.

In the Open series, the British declarer (who had received the [illegible] crafty opening lead!) followed the same line of play for the first [illegible] tricks. Then he ruffed a club, [illegible] trumps, cashed the queen of [illegible] and finessed in diamonds [illegible] East won the king and put [illegible] back on play with a diamond [illegible] cede a club trick to West [illegible] down.

Rugby Union Tri-Nations Series: South Africa 32 New Zealand 35

Bunce leads the fightback

Clinton van der Berg in Johannesburg

IT SAYS something for the state of the game in South Africa that Springbok spirits were lifted even in defeat. The series loss to the British Lions, in-fighting among provincial unions and a money deal that has again ravaged the domestic game were forgotten as South Africa and the All Blacks fought out an epic opening match of the 1997 Tri-Nations series.

After falling 23-7 behind in the opening half-hour the All Blacks staged one of the greatest fightbacks witnessed at the altitude venue of Ellis Park, scene of South Africa's 15-12 defeat of New Zealand in the 1995 World Cup final. Whereas South Africa committed basic errors at crucial times last Saturday, the All Blacks built towards a climax that revealed itself in rock-like defence.

Unlike the Lions Test series, which the British Isles won 2-1 despite being outscored nine to three in tries, South Africa were beaten by a team who scored more tries than they did — four to two. But the Springboks could at least salute a performance of quality by the fly-half, Jannie de Beer.

Granted he missed a 76th-minute penalty which would have levelled the scores, but his overall contribution rewarded Carel du Plessis's faith in him. After the coach's failed experiment with Henry Honiball in the first two Lions Tests, De Beer made his Test debut here earlier this month and kicked 13 points. But last Saturday he showed himself to be a master of the running game as well as kicking 22 points.

Frank Bunce was New Zealand's standard bearer as they swept to their first win here in five years. The 35-year-old midfielder, playing his 48th Test, ripped the home defences apart with two tries. Carlos Spencer, at fly-half, contributed 20 points. The All Black captain Sean Fitzpatrick left the field with a knee injury in the second half but should be fit to face the Australians in Melbourne on Saturday.

The Springboks played in their new Nike branding; the result of a $5 million deal brokered by Louis Luyt's son, also Louis. Luyt Jnr has taken a 10 per cent commission that has raised questions about his role in South African rugby.

However, any criticism has been deflected by the threat of four of the big five provincial unions, Western Province, Natal, Free State and Northern Transvaal, to pull out of the South African Rugby Football Union if it went ahead with a plan to transform South Africa's Super 12 sides into regional units. But after a meeting with Luyt Snr the unions backed down. Gauteng, his own province, had supported the move.

● Wales withstood a second-half onslaught by Canada at Fletcher's Field, Toronto, to finish their six-match tour of North America undefeated. But once again they struggled in the tight five and owed their 28-25 victory to flashes of inspiration from their backs.

Meanwhile, one of Rugby League's great attacking forces, Brisbane, overcame Wigan Warriors 30-4 at Central Park last Sunday, recording their fourth — and most satisfying — victory in Pool A of the World Club Championship.

Auckland Warriors brushed aside Bradford Bulls 64-14, inflicting on the British club their fourth straight defeat. Canterbury were 40-22 winners of their match against Halifax. Hunter Mariners, the only unbeaten side in the Australian Pool B, defeated Castleford Tigers 26-8, and Perth beat Sheffield 48-12. The London Broncos came from behind to defeat Canberra 38-18, while St Helens lost 28-12 to Cronulla Sharks.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Sunday best from Brown

SURREY batsman Alistair Brown was in sparkling form against Hampshire at Guildford. Sunday League records tumbled as the opener, with impeccable timing, plundered 203 runs off just 119 balls, hitting 11 sixes and 19 fours. He was finally dismissed in the last over after spooning a catch to John Stephenson off a Simon Renshaw full-toss.

It was the first double century in the history of the competition, easily surpassing the previous best of 176, set by Graham Gooch for Essex against Glamorgan in 1983. Brown said: "It was a great batting pitch. I rode my luck a bit out there but in the end I got a great score." Surrey, who scored 344 for 5 in 40 overs, went on to win by 68 runs.

Meanwhile Gooch, who still holds England's record for the highest number of runs in Test — 8,900 — has decided to retire from first-class cricket at the end of this week. Gooch, who was 44 last Wednesday, has played 118 times for England, on 34 occasions as captain. Only Mike Atherton and Peter May have captained their country more often.

MEN behaving badly on the football pitches are to have stiffer penalties imposed on them while those who show a healthy respect for the rules are to be rewarded under a carrot-and-stick scheme announced by the Football Association. From next season trouble-prone players will be banned after five yellow cards instead of six and there will be a further ban after eight bookings. Those booked 11 times will be hauled before an FA disciplinary committee. However those going five full games without receiving a yellow or red card will have a booking struck from the records.

NEWCASTLE United and Liverpool reinforced their title ambitions by making key signings last week. The Newcastle manager, Kenny Dalglish, short of defensive cover after selling Robbie Elliott to Bolton for $4 million, moved swiftly to sign Stuart Pearce after discovering that the 35-year-old former England captain had been given a free transfer by Nottingham Forest, ending his 12-year association with the club. Pearce has been given a two-year contract by Newcastle with a basic weekly wage of $25,000 and the option of another year.

A flight to Milan by Liverpool's vice-chairman and chief executive Peter Robinson brought Paul Ince to Merseyside. He wrapped up the signing of the England midfielder from Internazionale for $7 million. Ince was due to join his new team-mates for training this week and is expected to make his debut in a friendly against Bristol City.

David Hopkin and French star David Ginola were two other footballers on the move. Hopkin, the Crystal Palace midfielder, agreed to join Leeds United in a $5.4 million deal while Ginola became Tottenham Hotspur's $3.3 million acquisition from Newcastle United.

A DECISION by the selectors to omit the British athletics team captain Roger Black from the 400 metres for the world champions in Athens next month raised a storm of controversy. Among the critics was the Minister for Sport, Tony Banks. He said: "Roger is one of our best medal-winning athletes. If anything could have been done to have helped him I feel it should have, because he's been unfortunate with illness." The Olympic silver medallist's plea for more time to prove his recovery from a virus was refused by the selectors, who opted for James Baulch as the team's third 400m runner. Black will still make the trip but only as part of the 4 x 400m relay team.

GROUP 4 won the BT Global Challenge, billed as the world's toughest yacht race, after crossing the finish line in the Solent early on Wednesday last week. The yacht, skippered by Mike Golding, clinched victory on the final leg from Boston by completing the race over an hour ahead of her nearest rival, Toshiba Wave Warrior. A flotilla of more than 20 boats, including a ferry carrying friends and family members of the crew, met the 67ft yacht. Sailing westward — the "wrong way" against prevailing winds and currents — 14 identical steel yachts set out from Southampton 10 months ago. Group 4's combined overall time was 161days 5hr 25min 18sec.

NASEEM HAMED retained his World Boxing Organisation and International Boxing Federation featherweight titles by stopping the Argentine challenger Juan Cabrera in the second round at Wembley Arena. Hamed looked determined to score a quick victory when he inflicted a vicious uppercut on his opponent in the first round and a cut on the left eye in the second, which swelled rapidly. The referee intervened as Hamed launched yet another onslaught.

MICHAEL DOOHAN, Australia's world motorcycling champion, won the German 500cc grand prix — his sixth successive victory of the season. Doohan now has an almost invincible lead at the top of the table with six races remaining.

Cycling Tour de France

Young Ullrich tightens his stranglehold on the Tour

William Fotheringham in Courchevel

EVERY year the Tour de France's post office receives bags of letters for Richard Virenque, who is much loved by female fans for his vulnerable, curly-haired charm and fighting spirit. Virenque's valiant yet unsuccessful attempt to wrest the yellow jersey from Jan Ullrich last Sunday is likely to result in a fresh deluge of adoring mail.

The cherubic rider had slipped to more than six minutes behind Ullrich after Saturday's climb to l'Alpe d'Huez but, instead of admitting defeat and merely attempting to defend his second place, he ordered his team, Festina, to go on the attack.

Ullrich had looked impregnable so far in this Tour, but he showed signs of weakness on the descent from the first of the day's three massive climbs, the first-category Col du Glandon. He came close to flying off the road on a left-hand bend while Virenque and three of his team-mates were slightly ahead. As hairpin succeeded hairpin at dizzying speed he lost ground.

This left the 23-year-old with a difficult choice: he could waste valuable strength in a lone attempt to catch Virenque and his henchmen or wait for his own team-mates, who were over a minute behind, and hope they had the strength to regain the lost ground.

He showed wisdom beyond his years in taking the second option, setting up an epic pursuit between the Festina foursome and a group led by his Deutsche Telekom team-mates in the valley leading to the day's second mountain, the super-category Col de la Madeleine.

On the 13-mile climb to a summit surrounded by meadows both sets of *domestiques* swiftly dropped back, leaving Virenque on his own, with last year's winner Bjarne Riis leading Ullrich in pursuit.

For most of the ascent the 32-year-old towed the young man who had superseded him as the Telekom team leader a few days before. It was a direct reversal of last year's roles when Ullrich helped Riis to victory. Such selflessness in a defending champion is rare. At the foot of the perilous descent down the Madeleine, a sinuous single-track road with no barriers and a sheer drop into a green valley, Virenque was duly overhauled and another battle, for the stage win, began on the final climb to the ski-resort finish.

Ullrich clearly wanted to repay Riis for his assistance by helping the Dane take the stage, so he sat behind Virenque every time the little Frenchman upped the pace. Riis was unable to cope with the changes of rhythm and was repeatedly left behind.

Eventually Virenque realised he would have to make the pace on his own, and so he led all the way to the line. Ullrich clearly entertained thoughts of contesting the finish but then remembered the unwritten rule of professional racing — that a race leader should let his breakaway companion share the spoils — and permitted Virenque to cross the line first. It was a gesture he could afford to make, with the Tour effectively in the bag.

● Chris Boardman quit the race early in the 13th stage. The British rider had struggled over the past few days with neck and back injuries sustained in a crash in the Pyrenees.

Ullrich . . . signs of weakness

William Fotheringham is assistant editor of Cycling Weekly